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GUZ 50

Philippians

*Bible Commentary:
David Guzik TEV - L*

David Guzik

David Guzik's Commentary On
50 Philippians
Biblical Text – TEV (Good News Bible)

Greeting

Php 1:1 Paul, and Timothy, slaves of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and ministers:

Php 1:2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving and Prayer

Php 1:3 I thank my God on all the remembrance of you,

Php 1:4 always in my every prayer on your behalf making my prayer with joy

Php 1:5 over your fellowship in the gospel, from the first day until now,

Php 1:6 being persuaded of this very thing, that the One having begun a good work in you will finish it until the day of Jesus Christ;

Php 1:7 as it is righteous for me to think this of you all because you have me in your heart, both in my bonds and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you are all sharers of the grace with me.

Php 1:8 For God is my witness how I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

Php 1:9 And this I pray, that your love may yet abound more and more in full knowledge and all perception,

Php 1:10 for you to distinguish the things that differ, that you may be sincere and without blame for the day of Christ,

Php 1:11 being filled with the fruits of righteousness through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

The Advance of the Gospel

Php 1:12 But I want you to know, brothers, that the things concerning me have more fully come to the advancement of the gospel,

Php 1:13 so that in all the praetorium, and to all the rest, my bonds have become clearly revealed to be in Christ.

Php 1:14 And the most of the brothers in the Lord, being confident in my bonds, more exceedingly dare to speak the word fearlessly.

Php 1:15 Some, indeed, even proclaim Christ because of envy and strife, but some also because of good will.

Php 1:16 These, indeed, announce Christ out of party spirit, not sincerely, thinking to add affliction to my bonds.

Php 1:17 But these others out of love, knowing that I am set for defense of the gospel.

To Live Is Christ

Php 1:18 For what? Yet in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is announced, and I rejoice in this; yet also I will rejoice.

Php 1:19 For I know that this will result in deliverance to me through your petition and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, Job 13:16

Php 1:20 according to my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but as always in all boldness even now Christ will be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death.

Php 1:21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Php 1:22 But if I live in the flesh, this to me is fruit of my labor, and what I shall choose I do not know.

Php 1:23 For I am pressed together by the two: having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better,

Php 1:24 but to remain in the flesh is more necessary on account of you.

Php 1:25 And being persuaded of this, I know that I will remain and will continue with you all for your advancement and joy of faith,

Php 1:26 so that your glorying may abound in Christ Jesus in me through my presence with you again.

Php 1:27 Only behave yourself worthily of the gospel of Christ, so that whether coming and seeing you or being absent, I hear the things concerning you, that you stand fast in one spirit and one soul, striving together in the faith of the gospel,

Php 1:28 and not being terrified in anything by those who oppose, which to them truly is a proof of destruction, but to you of salvation, and this from God;

Php 1:29 because it was granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer on His behalf,

Php 1:30 having the same struggle which you saw in me and now hear to be in me.

Philippians 1:1-30

Philippians 1 - Paul's Love and Concern for the Philippians

A. Paul's greeting to the Philippian Christians and his prayer for them.

1. (1-2) Address and initial greeting.

Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

a. **Paul and Timothy:** The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to his close friends, the Christians in Philippi, from his Roman house arrest described at the end of Acts

(Act 28:30-31) as he waited for his court appearance before Caesar (around the year A.D. 61).

b. **To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi:** The church in **Philippi** was founded by Paul some eleven years before this letter on his second missionary journey (Act 16:11-40). This was the first church established on the continent of Europe.

c. **To all:** Paul addressed the letter to three groups.

- **To all the saints in Christ Jesus:** This means all the Christians in Philippi. **All** Christians *are* **saints**, but *only* **in Christ Jesus**.

- **To the bishops:** In a general sense, this meant those with leadership responsibilities. The ancient Greek word meant *overseers* and was used to describe general leadership before it came to describe a specific *office* recognized by some Christian traditions.

- **To the deacons:** Those who had recognized positions of *service*.

d. **Grace to you and peace:** Paul gave his familiar greeting of **grace** and **peace**, recognizing that these come to us only from God our Father and through the Son.

2. (3-6) *Paul gives thanks for the Philippian Christians.*

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;

a. **I thank my God upon every remembrance of you:** When Paul remembered what all the Philippians did for him, he was extremely thankful. He was naturally

grateful to the Philippians, but more so to **God** who had worked such kindness through the Philippians.

i. The Philippians were extremely giving towards Paul, both when he was with them (Act 16:15; Act 16:32-34) and when he was apart from them (2Co 8:1-7; 2Co 9:1-4; 2Co 11:9).

b. **Making request for you all:** Paul prayed for the Philippians and he did so with **joy**. This was one way Paul felt he could repay the Philippians for all they did for him.

i. One might simply say that when Paul prayed for the Philippians, he became happy. It is remarkable to see that Paul's first reference to his own feelings or frame of mind in this letter is that of **joy** – though he wrote from prison and a possible soon execution.

ii. "It is a glorious revelation of how life in fellowship with Christ triumphs over all adverse circumstances. The triumph, moreover, is not that of stoical indifference. It is rather the recognition of the fact that all apparently adverse conditions are made allies of the soul and ministers of victory, under the dominion of the Lord." (Morgan)

iii. "This is Paul's great singing letter. It was at Philippi that he had sung in prison at midnight, in the company of Silas. Now he was again in prison, this time in Rome." (Morgan)

c. **For your fellowship in the gospel:** This was one reason Paul was thankful for the Philippians. The idea is that the Philippians "partnered" with Paul in his spreading of the gospel through their friendship and financial support, and they did so **from the first day until now**. They didn't wait to see if Paul was a "winner" before they supported him. They got behind Paul and his ministry early.

d. **He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ:** When Paul thought of the beginning of God's work among the Philippians (**from the first day**), it was natural that he also thought of the day when that work would be **complete**. Paul also expressed his *confidence* in God's ability to complete that work.

i. It was indeed a **good work** begun in the Philippians and in all believers. "The work of grace has its root in the divine goodness of the Father, it is planted by the self-denying goodness of the Son, and it is daily watered by the goodness of the Holy Spirit; it springs from good and leads to good, and so is altogether good." (Spurgeon)

ii. Because this **good work** was begun, Paul was confident of its *completion*. God is a worker who completes His works. "Where is there an instance of God's beginning any work and leaving it incomplete? Show me for once a world abandoned and thrown aside half formed; show me a universe cast off from the Great Potter's wheel, with the design in outline, the clay half hardened, and the form unshapely from incompleteness." (Spurgeon)

iii. This work in the believer will not be finally complete until **the day of Jesus Christ**, which in context has the idea of the second coming of Jesus and our resurrection with Him. "Holy Scripture does not regard a man as perfect when the soul is perfected, it regards his body as being a part of himself; and as the body will not rise again from the grave till the coming of the Lord Jesus, when we shall be revealed in the perfection of our manhood, even as he will be revealed, that day of the second coming

is set as the day of the finished work which God hath begun." (Spurgeon)

3. (7-8) Paul declares his affection for the Philippians.

Just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

a. **It is right for me to think this of you all:** Paul's thankfulness, joy, and desire to pray for the Philippians was right because they stood beside him in his trials for the gospel, and they received the same grace he did (**you all are partakers with me of grace**).

b. **I have you in my heart:** Paul was a man of towering intellect, but he was also a man of great **heart**, and the Philippian Christians were in his **heart**. He could even call God as his **witness** regarding his deep **affection** for them.

i. Adam Clarke paraphrased Paul's idea here: "I call God to witness that I have the strongest affection for you, and that I love you with that same kind of tender concern with which Christ loved the world when he gave himself for it."

4. (9-11) Paul's prayer for the Philippians.

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

a. **This I pray, that your love may abound still more and more:** The Philippians had a lot of love, and they showed it to Paul. Yet Paul didn't hesitate to pray that their love would **abound still more and more**. It doesn't matter how much love for others we have; we can still have more!

i. "That it may be like a river, perpetually fed with rain and fresh streams so that it continues to swell and increase until it fills all its banks, and floods the adjacent plains." (Clarke)

b. **That your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment:** Yet, the love Paul wanted to abound in the Philippians was not "blind love." It was love that had **knowledge and all discernment**; it was love that could **approve the things that are excellent**.

i. Paul knew the danger of an undiscerning love. He rebuked the Corinthian church that seemed to glory in their "love" and "openness" which lacked any sense of knowledge and discernment (1Co 5:1-7).

c. **That you may be sincere and without offense:** When we approve and receive **the things that are excellent**, we become **sincere** (speaking of *inner* righteousness) **and without offense** (speaking of *outer* righteousness that can be seen). **Till the day of Christ** means that these things become increasingly evident in our life until Jesus comes.

i. Being **sincere** is important, but alone it is not enough. Notorious sinners in the days of Jesus such as tax collectors were sincere, yet they still needed to repent. As well, being **without offense** before others is important, but alone it is not enough. The Pharisees of Jesus' day were without offense in the opinion of

many. We want God to make us *both* **sincere** and **without offense**.

d. **Being filled with the fruits of righteousness:** The work of becoming **sincere and without offense** is really God's work within us. It happens as we are **filled with the fruits of righteousness**.

i. Bearing fruit is always the result of abiding in Jesus (Joh 15:4-6). As we abide in Him, we receive the life and nutrients we need to naturally bear fruit **to the glory and praise of God**.

ii. "Every genuine follower of God has his glory in view by all that he does, says, or intends. He loves to glorify God, and he glorifies him by showing forth in his conversion the glorious working of the glorious power of the Lord." (Clarke)

B. Paul explains his present circumstances.

1. (12-14) *Paul's imprisonment has not hindered the gospel in any way.*

But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

a. **The things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel:** Paul here answered a concern of the Philippians. He wanted them to know that God's blessing and power were still with him, even though he was in prison. He was not out of the will of God, and God's work still continued.

i. When Paul was with the Philippians, there were amazing examples of the sovereign power of God,

culminating in a divine jail-break and their vindication before civil magistrates (

Act 16:11-40). We are not surprised that the Philippians wondered where the power of God was in Paul's *present* imprisonment.

ii. We also know that all this turned out **for the furtherance of the gospel** because during this time he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians.

iii. God didn't waste Paul's time during the Roman imprisonment. God never wastes our time, though we may waste it by not sensing God's purpose for our lives at the moment.

b. **The furtherance of the gospel:** Paul doesn't mention if *he* was being advanced, because he didn't care about that and he assumed that the Philippians didn't care either. Their common passion was the **furtherance of the gospel**, and the gospel continued to advance.

c. **It has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ:** The circumstances around Paul's imprisonment and his manner in the midst of it made it clear to all observers that he was not just another prisoner, but that he was an emissary of Jesus Christ. This witness led to the conversion of many, even some of the **palace guard**.

i. From this we see that Paul could minister effectively and bring glory to God in less than ideal circumstances. He didn't need everything to be easy and set in order to be fruitful.

d. **Having become confident by my chains:** Paul's imprisonment gave the Christians around him - who were not imprisoned - greater confidence and boldness.

- They saw that Paul had *joy* in the midst of such a trial.
- They saw that God would *take care* of Paul in such circumstances.
- They saw that God could still *use* Paul even when he was imprisoned.

2. (15-18) *Paul considers the motives of others in their preaching.*

Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only *that* in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.

a. **Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife:** Paul knew that some preached because they wanted to “surpass” Paul in ministry and to promote their own name and place above Paul’s.

i. These people were *glad* Paul was imprisoned because they felt this gave them a competitive edge over him in what they considered to be the contest of preaching the gospel. They were motivated - at least in part - by a competitive spirit, which too often is common among preachers.

ii. Paul wasn’t so critical or cynical to believe that *every* other preacher had bad motives. He knew that **some also** preached **from good will**.

b. **The former preach Christ from selfish ambition:** Those preaching the gospel out of wrong motives are infected with **selfish ambition**, which makes them serve, but **not sincerely**.

i. **Ambition** isn't necessarily bad; there is nothing wrong in wanting to be the best we can be for God. But **selfish ambition** is most concerned about a successful *image*, instead of striving for true success before God.

c. **Supposing to add affliction to my chains:** Those who preached Christ from the wrong motive supposed **to add affliction to Paul's chains**. Their competitive hearts didn't only want to win for themselves; they also wanted Paul to lose.

i. They wanted Paul to admit the humiliation of having to admit that others were more effective in ministry than he was. They didn't understand that Paul honestly didn't care about this, because he did not have a competitive spirit in ministry.

ii. A.W. Tozer wrote this powerful piece rebuking the attitude of competition that is common among those in the ministry: "Dear Lord, I refuse henceforth to compete with any of Thy servants. They have congregations larger than mine. So be it. I rejoice in their success. They have greater gifts. Very well. That is not in their power nor in mine. I am humbly grateful for their greater gifts and my smaller ones. I only pray that I may use to Thy glory such modest gifts as I possess. I will not compare myself with any, nor try to build up my self-esteem by noting where I may excel one or another in Thy holy work. I herewith make a blanket disavowal of all intrinsic worth. I am but an unprofitable servant. I gladly go to the foot of the cross and own myself the least of Thy people. If I err in my self-judgment and actually underestimate myself I do not want to know it. I purpose to pray for others and to rejoice in their prosperity as if it were my own. And indeed it is my

own if it is Thine own, for what is Thine is mine, and while one plants and another waters it is Thou alone that giveth the increase." (from *The Price of Neglect*, 104-105)

d. **Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice:** So, people preached the gospel more energetically, motivated by Paul's imprisonment. Some were motivated in a good way and some were motivated in a bad way; yet nonetheless, they were *motivated* - and Paul could **rejoice** in that.

i. Remember that Paul's concern here was *not* with the *content* of the gospel being preached, only with the *motives* of those who preached. Paul objected if he thought a false or distorted gospel was preached, even if from the best of motives (Gal 1:6-9).

ii. Paul's attitude went like this: "If you preach the true gospel, I don't care what your motives are. If your motives are bad, God will deal with you - but at least the gospel is preached. But if you preach a false gospel, I don't care how good your motives are. You are dangerous and must stop preaching your false gospel, and good motives don't excuse your false message."

iii. If Paul's imprisonment could not hinder the gospel, neither could the wrong motives of some. God's work was still getting done, and that was cause for rejoicing.

3. (19-20) *Paul's confidence in his present circumstances.*

For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all

boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

a. I know that this will turn out for my deliverance:

Paul knew that the Lord was in control of all events, even though his imprisonment and impending trial before Caesar Nero made the situation look pretty dark.

b. Through your prayer: Paul was so confident because he knew that the Philippians prayed for him. His **deliverance** in the present situation was connected to the **prayer** of the Philippians.

i. We can hypothetically say that if the Philippians *didn't* pray for Paul, then God's deliverance for Paul would be hindered. It certainly seems that Paul thought this way, and it shows what a serious matter prayer is.

c. Through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ: However, it was not the prayer of the Philippians in and of itself that would meet Paul's need. It was the **supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ** that came to Paul **through** the prayer of the Philippians. Paul's needs were met by the Spirit of God, but this provision to Paul was brought about by the prayers of the Philippians.

d. My earnest expectation and hope: These are words of faith. Paul mightily trusted God here, and Paul first trusted God **that in nothing I shall be ashamed**. He believed that God would not cause him to be **ashamed** or that God would not turn against him in the matter.

i. Though he was in prison and awaiting trial before Caesar, Paul had the confidence that he was in the center of God's will. He knew God was not punishing him through the adversity he experienced at the time.

e. Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death: Paul also had this trust, and admitted to the Philippians that he might not be released from this present imprisonment, but it might instead result in his martyrdom.

i. Paul lived his life not to preserve and promote himself, but to glorify Jesus Christ. If Jesus should one day decide that Paul could best glorify Him through laying down his life, then Paul would be well pleased by the opportunity.

ii. Even so, this must have hit hard on the Philippians who saw God do so many remarkable miracles of deliverance in Paul's life among them in Philippi (Act 16:11-40). It would have been easy for the Philippians to associate God's glory only with being delivered *from* one's problems, not in being delivered in the *midst* of one's problems.

iii. It is easy for us to dictate to God *how* He can and cannot glorify Himself in our lives. Paul wisely left all that up to God.

4. (21-26) Paul's lack of fear regarding death and how it affected his outlook on ministry.

For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. But if *I* live on in the flesh, this *will mean* fruit from *my* labor; yet what *I* shall choose *I* cannot tell. For *I* am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh *is* more needful for you. And being confident of this, *I* know that *I* shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.

a. **For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain:** Paul knew that death was not a defeat to the Christian. It is merely a graduation to glory, a net **gain** for the Christian.

i. Paul's death at the time would be a **gain** in two senses.

- First, his death for the cause of Christ would glorify Jesus, and that was **gain**.
- Second, to be in the immediate presence of the Lord was **gain** for Paul.

ii. The idea that Paul could consider death a present **gain** argues against the idea of "soul sleep." This false teaching says that the believing dead are held in some sort of suspended animation until the resurrection occurs. His understanding that his death might be considered **gain** also argues against the idea of "purgatory" which says that the believing dead must be purified through suffering before coming into the presence of God.

iii. This also obviously showed that Paul did not *fear* death. Though some men may fear *dying*, no Christian should fear *death*. "When men fear death it is not certain that they are wicked, but it is quite certain that if they have faith it is in a very weak and sickly condition." (Spurgeon)

b. **But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor:** Paul was confident that God intended him to be fruitful. There was no doubt in Paul's mind that this was God's plan for him. If Paul lived, it would be a fruitful life.

i. In sad contrast, many Christians have not yet come to the place where it is a certainty that they will bear fruit for the kingdom of God with their life.

c. **For I am hard pressed between the two:** Knowing that his death could be a gain - both for the gospel and for him personally - Paul was torn between being with the Lord or continuing to minister to the Philippians and others.

d. **Having a desire to depart and be with Christ:** It is strong to say, but one must say that Paul, in some way, *wanted to die*. In fact, **desire** describes a strong longing: "He said he had a desire to depart, and the desire was a strong one. The Greek word has much force in it. He panteth, he longeth to be gone." (Spurgeon)

i. Other men have also wanted to die.

- Some men have wished to die, gripped by the gloom and darkness that leads to suicide.
- Some have been so tired of this world and the cruelty of others that they thought death was better.
- Some have wanted to die in the crisis of some kind of suffering.

ii. Paul's **desire to depart** had nothing in common with these attitudes among men. Paul probably had many motivations to depart.

- Going to heaven meant he would finally be done with sin and temptation.
- Going to heaven meant that he would see those brothers and sisters who had gone to heaven before him.
- Most of all, going to heaven meant being **with Christ** in a closer and better way than ever before.

iii. **Having a desire to depart:** "It appears to be a metaphor taken from the commander of a vessel, in a foreign port, who feels a strong desire, to set sail, and get to his own country and family; but this desire is

counterbalanced by a conviction that the general interests of the voyage may be best answered by his longer stay in the port where his vessel now rides; for he is not in dock, he is not aground, but rides at anchor in the port, and may any hour weigh and be gone." (Clarke)

iv. Paul knew that if he did **depart**, the journey would not be long. "The sail is spread; the soul is launched upon the deep. How long will be its voyage? How many wearying winds must beat upon the sail ere it shall be reefed in the port of peace? How often shall that soul be tossed upon the waves before it comes to the sea that knows no storm. Oh tell it, tell it everywhere; yon ship that has just departed is already at its haven. It did but spread its sail and it was there." (Spurgeon)

e. **Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you:** Paul understood that others still needed him; that his work was not yet done. So while allowing for the possibility of his martyrdom, he told the Philippians that he *expects* to be spared at this time (**I know that I shall remain and continue with you**).

i. Paul was **confident** and full of faith, yet seems short of absolute certainty. His lack of absolute certainty is a comfort to us. Even the great apostle did not have a prophet's certainty about the future.

ii. As it happened, Paul survived this imprisonment, was set free, and was martyred later at Rome. He did come to visit the Philippians again.

f. **That your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again:** Paul's friendship with the Philippians was so close that he knew that they would be **rejoicing** to see him again.

C. How the Philippians should act in Paul's absence.

1. (27) Paul wanted the Philippians to work together for the cause of the gospel.

Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,

a. **Only let your conduct:** The ancient Greek word translated "**conduct**" means literally, "to live as a citizen." Paul told the Philippians to be good, patriotic citizens of the kingdom of God. This is a theme he will draw on again in Philippians.

b. **I may hear of your affairs:** Paul wanted the Philippians to know they were accountable before him. He would check up on them.

c. **That you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind:** Paul wanted to know that the Philippian church stayed together as one body, without becoming fragmented and fractionalized.

d. **Striving together for the faith of the gospel:** Paul wanted their unity to be put to a productive purpose, so that an increasing trust and belief in the good news of Jesus Christ would be promoted among those who already believed and among those who had yet to believe.

2. (28) Paul wants the Philippians to be bold before their adversaries.

And not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.

a. And not in any way terrified by your adversaries:

In the ancient Greek language, **terrified** "is a vivid term, unique in the Greek Bible and denoting the uncontrollable stampede of startled horses." (Martin) In the face of this kind of opposition, Paul wanted the Philippian Christians to have the same kind of boldness he had.

b. Which is to them a proof of perdition: When Christians are **not in any way terrified by** [their] **adversaries**, that in itself is **proof of perdition** - meaning *destruction* - to their adversaries.

i. **Perdition** (the ancient Greek word *apolia*) means *destruction, wasting, or damnation*. The word is also used in places like Php 3:19 and 2Pe 2:1. Both Judas (Joh 17:12) and the Antichrist (2Th 2:3) are called the *son of perdition*.

ii. When Christians stand strong against intimidation against the world, the flesh and the devil, it shows those spiritual enemies that their ultimate destruction is certain.

iii. When our spiritual enemies fail to make us afraid, they have failed completely because they really have no other weapon than fear and intimidation.

iv. When we *fail* to be **not in any way terrified by our adversaries**, we give "hope" and "confidence" to our spiritual enemies, even though it is a false hope and confidence because their destruction is still assured.

c. But to you of salvation: When Christians are **not in any way terrified by** [their] **adversaries**, it is also evidence of their own **salvation**. In the Lord, we can surprise ourselves with our boldness.

3. (29-30) *Why the Philippians need not be terrified by their adversaries: the attacks and challenges they face are ordained by God.*

For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear *is* in me.

a. **For to you it has been granted:** It was **granted** to the Philippians to **believe in Him**. In the same way this belief was **granted** to them, so also was the privilege to **suffer for His sake**.

i. The Philippians didn't need to fear that their present trial (and Paul's present trial) meant that God abandoned them. Their present difficulty was **granted** to them, not as a punishment, but as a tool in God's hand.

b. **But also to suffer for His sake:** The ancient Greek word for **suffer** here is *pasko*. This word is used primarily in the sense of persecution. However, it is also used of physical sufferings not related to persecution (Act 28:5, and Mat 17:15), of suffering under temptation (Heb 2:18) and hardships in a general sense (1Co 12:26, and Gal 3:4).

i. "Everyone cannot be trusted with suffering. All could not stand the fiery ordeal. They would speak rashly and complainingly. So the Master has to select with careful scrutiny the branches which can stand the knife." (Meyer)

ii. "Look up and take each throb of pain, each hour of agony, as a gift. Dare to thank Him for it. Look inside the envelope of pain for the message it enfolds. It is a rough packing-case, but there is treasure in it." (Meyer)

c. **Having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me:** The Philippians had the same kind of **conflict** Paul had among them in Philippi and the same kind that Paul faced in Rome. The **conflict** of the Philippians concerned the difficulty of walking right with the Lord and proclaiming the gospel when persecuted and under attack.

i. **Conflict** is the ancient Greek word *agon*, which described a place where athletic contests were held and later came to refer to the contest itself. We get our words *agony* and *agonize* from this ancient Greek word.

ii. If the Philippians had Paul's kind of **conflict**, they could also have Paul's kind of joy and fruit in the midst of it.

Christ's Example of Humility

Php 2:1 Then if there is any comfort in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tenderesses and compassions,

Php 2:2 fulfill my joy, that you think the same, having the same love, one in soul, minding the one thing,

Php 2:3 doing nothing according to party spirit or self-glory, but in humility, esteeming one another to surpass themselves;

Php 2:4 each not looking at their own things, but each also at the things of others.

Php 2:5 For let this mind be in you which also was in Christ Jesus,

Php 2:6 who subsisting in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God,

Php 2:7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, having become in the likeness of men

Php 2:8 and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, having become obedient until death, even the death of a cross.

Php 2:9 Because of this also God highly exalted Him and gave Him a name above every name,

Php 2:10 that at the name of Jesus "every knee should bow," of heavenly ones, and earthly ones, and ones under the earth,

Php 2:11 and "every tongue should confess" that Jesus Christ is "Lord," to the glory of God the Father. Isa. 45:23

Lights in the World

Php 2:12 So, then, my beloved, even as you always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much rather in my absence, cultivate your salvation with fear and trembling,

Php 2:13 for it is God who is working in you both to will and to work for the sake of His good pleasure.

Php 2:14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings,

Php 2:15 that you may be blameless and harmless, children of God, without fault in the midst of a crooked generation, even having been perverted, among whom you shine as luminaries in the world,

Php 2:16 holding up a word of life, for a boast to me in the day of Christ, that I ran not in vain, nor labored in vain.

Php 2:17 But if indeed I am poured out on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice; yea, I rejoice with you all.

Php 2:18 And you also rejoice in the same and rejoice with me.

Timothy and Epaphroditus

Php 2:19 But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I may also be of good cheer, knowing the things about you.

Php 2:20 For I have no one like-minded, who genuinely will care for the things about you.

Php 2:21 For all seek their own things, not the things of Christ Jesus.

Php 2:22 But you know the proof of him, that as a child to a father, he served with me for the gospel.

Php 2:23 Then I hope to send this one at once, whenever I shall see the things about me.

Php 2:24 But I trust in the Lord that I myself also will come soon.

Php 2:25 But I thought it needful to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow-worker, and my fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister of my need,

Php 2:26 since he was longing for you all and has been troubled because you heard that he was sick.

Php 2:27 For indeed he was sick, coming near to death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him, but also me, lest I should have grief on grief.

Php 2:28 Therefore, I sent him more eagerly, that seeing him again you may rejoice, and I may be less grieved.

Php 2:29 Then receive him in the Lord with all joy and hold such in honor,

Php 2:30 that through the work of Christ he drew near to death, having disregarded his life, that he may fill up your lack of service toward me.

Philippians 2:1-30

Philippians 2 - Humble Living In Light of Jesus' Humble Example

A. How Paul wants the Philippians to live with each other.

1. (1) The basis of Paul's exhortation to the Philippians.

Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any

affection and mercy,

a. **Therefore:** This draws back to what Paul has built on in Php 1:27-30, telling the Philippians how to stand strong for the Lord against *external* conflicts. Now he tells them how to act against *internal* conflicts in the body of Christ.

b. **If there is any:** This introduces the *basis* for Paul's exhortation to unity, humility and love among believers. The idea is that if the Philippian Christians have received the things he mentions, then they have a responsibility to do what he is about to describe.

i. "It is extremely difficult to give the force of these expressions; they contain a torrent of most affecting eloquence; the apostle pouring out his whole heart to a people whom with all his heart he loved, and who were worthy of the love even of an apostle." (Clarke)

c. **If there is any consolation in Christ:** Paul asked this as a rhetorical question, knowing of course that there was great **consolation in Christ**. Every Christian should know the **consolation of Christ**.

i. Luk 2:25 says that one of the titles for Jesus as the Messiah is *the Consolation of Israel*. Paul could say in 2Co 1:5, *For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ*. In 2Th 2:16, Paul says that *God has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace*. Of course there is **consolation in Christ!**

ii. "The Holy Spirit consoles, but Christ *is the consolation*. If I may use the figure, the Holy Spirit is the Physician, but Christ is the medicine." (Spurgeon)

d. **If there is any... comfort of love:** This is Paul's second rhetorical question in this passage, affirming the

great **comfort of love**. Every Christian should know what it is to have Jesus give him the **comfort of love**.

i. 2Co 1:3 says that God is the *God of all comfort*. There is no way He cannot comfort us and no circumstance beyond His comfort. But this is more than comfort; this is the **comfort of love**.

ii. The word **comfort** in this passage is the ancient Greek word *paraklesis*. The idea behind this word for **comfort** in the New Testament is always more than soothing sympathy. It has the idea of strengthening, of helping, of making strong. The idea behind this word is communicated by the Latin word for **comfort** (*fortis*), which also means "brave." The love of God in our life makes us strong and makes us brave. Of course there is **comfort of love**!

e. **If there is any... fellowship of the Spirit:** This is Paul's third rhetorical question in this context. Paul knew and valued the **fellowship of the Spirit**, and every Christian should know what it is to have the **fellowship of the Spirit**.

i. **Fellowship** is the ancient Greek word *kononia*. It means the sharing of things in common. We share life with the Spirit of God that we never knew before. The Holy Spirit fills and guides and moves in our lives in a powerful and precious way. Of course there is **fellowship of the Spirit**!

ii. "The Lord doth usually and graciously water the holy fellowship of his people with the dews of many sweet and glorious refreshings; so that they have a very heaven upon earth." (Trapp)

f. **If there is any... affection and mercy:** Paul's final rhetorical question assumes that every Christian knows

something of the **affection** of God and of the **mercy** of God.

i. Paul mentioned these things in a manner that suggests to us that they should all be obvious parts of the Christian's experience. To make his rhetorical point, he could have just as easily said, "If water is wet, if fire is hot, if rocks are hard," and so forth.

ii. Each of these gifts – **consolation in Christ, comfort of love, fellowship of the Spirit, affection and mercy** – are communicated to us both in a direct, spiritual way from Jesus, and from Jesus *through His people*. But there isn't any doubt that these are real gifts for Christians to really experience.

2. (2-4) *The specifics of Paul's exhortation to the Philippians regarding love and humility among believers.*

Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

a. **Fulfill my joy**: This speaks of a personal request. Part of the reason Paul wanted the Philippians to take heed to his word was because they should know that it would make the founding apostle of their church happy.

b. **By being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind**: These together all speak of the same idea: a deep, abiding, internal unity among the Philippians.

i. This unity is the goal. What follows in Php 2:3-4 are descriptions of how to achieve and practice the unity mentioned here in Php 2:2.

c. **Let nothing be done through selfish ambition:**

This is the first step to this kind of unity. In the flesh, we are often motivated by **selfish ambition** or **conceit**. Much of what we do is not done out of love for others, but out of our own desire for “advancement” or “promotion” (**selfish ambition**).

- i. Paul found it important to say **selfish ambition**. Not all ambition is *selfish* ambition, and there is a *good ambition* to glorify God and serve Him with everything we have.

d. **Let nothing be done through... conceit:** This is the second step to this kind of unity. **Conceit** is thinking too highly of one’s self, of having an excessive self-interest and self-preoccupation. It could be more literally translated “empty glory.”

- i. A dictionary definition of **conceit** is “An excessively favorable opinion of one’s own ability, importance, wit,” and so forth. When we live with the feeling that we are so important, or so able, or so talented, we are out of God’s will. We are working against the unity Paul pleaded with the Philippians and all Christians to have.

e. **In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself:** This third step to the kind of unity described in Php 2:2 is completely contradictory to the attitude of the world, because **lowliness of mind** is about the least attractive thing to the thinking of this world.

- i. The ancient Greeks considered **lowliness of mind** to be a fault, not a virtue. “The pagan and the secular idea of manhood is self-assertiveness, imposing one’s will on others; when anyone stooped to others he did so only under compulsion, hence his action was ignominious [disgraceful]. The Christian ethical idea of

humility could not be reached by the secular mind; it lacked the spiritual soil.” (Lenski)

ii. “In pagan writers generally, the word had a bad meaning, ‘abject, grovelling.’ But when it comes into the New Testament, its meaning is ennobled.” (Wuest)

iii. “The apostle knew that, to create concord, you need first to beget lowliness of mind. Men do not quarrel when their ambitions have come to an end.” (Spurgeon)

f. **Esteem others better than himself:** This rebukes much of the culture’s concept of self-esteem. The Bible knows nothing of the idea that we should - and must - carry with us an attitude of confident superiority in every situation, and knows nothing of the idea that this is the foundation for a healthy human personality.

i. While we recognize the intrinsic value of every human life, we can’t deny that the low self-esteem of some is *justified*, and based in *reality*. When we are in rebellion against God, it is fitting for us to have a low self-esteem.

ii. As we **esteem others better**, we will naturally have a concern for their needs and concerns. This sort of *outward* looking mentality naturally leads to a unity among the people of God.

iii. If I consider you above me and you consider me above you, then a marvelous thing happens: we have a community where everyone is looked up to, and no one is looked down on.

g. **Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others:** Here the thought is completed. As we put away our selfish ambitions, our conceit, and our tendencies to be high-

minded and self-absorbed, we will naturally have a greater concern for the interests and needs of others.

- i. Paul doesn't tell us that it is wrong to **look out** for our own interests, but that we should not **only** look out for our own interests.

B. Jesus, the ultimate example of humility.

Many regard Php 2:5-11 as a hymn of the early church that Paul incorporated into his letter. Some commentators go so far as to suggest stanza and verse arrangements for the "hymn." This is possible, but not a necessary conclusion; Paul was capable of such inspired, poetic writing himself (example: 1 Corinthians 13). For reasons which we will examine later, this passage is often known as the kenosis passage.

1. (5) *Paul applies the lesson before he states it.*

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

a. **Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus:** Paul will, in wonderful detail, describe for us the **mind** of Jesus in the following verses. But here, before he describes the mind of Jesus, he tells us what we must *do* with the information.

- i. "Paul does not give all that is in the mind of Christ in these verses. He selects those qualities of our Lord which fit the needs of the Philippians at that moment... This lack of unity among the Philippian saints became the occasion for perhaps the greatest Christological passage in the New Testament that sounds the depths of the incarnation." (Wuest)

b. **Let this mind be in you:** It is all too easy for us to read the following description of Jesus and admire it from a distance. God wants us to be awed by it, but also to see it as something that we must enter into and imitate.

Let this mind means that it is something that we have *choice* about.

i. Remember also that this

mind is something granted to us by God. 1Co 2:16 says that *we have the mind of Christ*. But **let this mind** shows us that it is also something we must *choose* to walk in. You have to **let** it be so.

2. (6a) Jesus was ***in the form of God***.

Who, being in the form of God,

a. **In the form of God:** This describes Jesus' pre-incarnate existence. We must remind ourselves that Jesus did not begin His existence in the manger at Bethlehem, but is eternal God.

b. **Being:** This is from the ancient Greek verb *huparchein*, which "describes that which a man is in his very essence and which cannot be changed. It describes that part of a man which, in any circumstances, remains the same." (Barclay)

i. "Paul, by the use of the Greek word translated 'being,' informs his Greek readers that our Lord's possession of the divine essence did not cease to be a fact when He came to earth to assume human form... *This word alone is enough to refute the claim of Modernism that our Lord emptied Himself of His Deity when He became Man.*" (Wuest)

c. **Form:** This translates the ancient Greek word *morphe*. It "always signifies a form which truly and fully expresses the being which underlies it... the words mean 'the being on an equality with God.'" (Kennedy)

i. "*Morphe* is the essential form which never alters; *schema* is the outward form which changes from time

to time and from circumstance to circumstance.”
(Barclay)

ii. “‘God’ has a form, and ‘Jesus Christ’ exists in this form of God.” (Lenski)

iii. Wuest explains that the ancient Greek word translated **form** is very difficult to translate. When we use the word **form**, we think of the *shape* of something; but the ancient Greek word had none of that idea. It is more the idea of a *mode* or an *essence*; it is the essential nature of God, without implying a physical shape or image. “Thus the Greek word for ‘form’ refers to that outward expression which a person gives of his inmost nature.”

3. (6b) *Jesus did not cling to the privileges of deity.*

Did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

a. **Did not consider it robbery:** The ancient Greek in this phrase has the idea of something being grasped or clung to. Jesus did not cling to the prerogatives or privileges of deity.

i. Wuest defines the ancient Greek word translated **robbery** as, “A treasure to be clutched and retained at all hazards.”

b. **To be equal with God:** It wasn’t that Jesus was trying to *achieve* equality with the Father. He *had it*, and chose not to cling to it. Jesus’ divine nature was not something He had to seek for or acquire, but it was His already.

i. Lightfoot wrote that it was not “a prize which must not slip from His grasp, a treasure to be clutched and retained at all hazards.” Jesus was willing to let go of some of the prerogatives of deity to become a man.

4. (7) *Jesus made Himself of **no reputation**.*

But made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men.

a. **But made Himself of no reputation:** The more common (and well-known) translation of this is that *He emptied Himself*. From the ancient Greek word *emptied* (*kenosis*) came the idea that Jesus' incarnation was essentially a self-emptying.

i. We must carefully think about what Jesus *emptied* Himself of. Paul will tell us plainly in the following verses, but we must take care that we do not think that Jesus emptied Himself of His deity in any way.

ii. Some develop the *kenotic theory* of the incarnation to the point where they insist that Jesus divested Himself of many of the attributes of deity - such as omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, and even suffered the elimination of His own divine self-consciousness. Yet Jesus did not (and *could* not) become "less God" in the incarnation. No deity was *subtracted* (though he did renounce some of the rights of deity); rather humanity was *added* to His nature.

iii. "During his humiliation, as God and equal with the Father, was no encroachment on the Divine prerogative; for, as he had an *equality* of *nature*, he had an *equality* of *rights*." (Clarke)

iv. "His condescension was free, and unconstrained with the consent of his Father... the Son of the Highest can, at his own pleasure, show or eclipse his own glorious brightness, abate or let out his fullness, exalt or abase himself in respect of us." (Poole)

v. "Even as a king, by laying aside the tokens of his royalty, and putting on the habit of a merchant, when

all the while he ceaseth not to be a king, or the highest in his own dominions.” (Poole)

b. **Taking the form of a bondservant:** This describes *how* Jesus emptied Himself. Though he took **the form of a bondservant**, Jesus did not empty Himself of His deity, or of any of His attributes, or of His equality with God. He emptied Himself *into* the form of a **bondservant**, not merely the form of a man.

i. **Taking** (the ancient Greek word *labon*) does not imply an *exchange*, but an *addition*.

c. **Coming in the likeness of men:** This further describes how Jesus emptied Himself. We can think of someone who is a servant, but not in the **likeness of men**. Angels are servants, but not in the **likeness of men**. In fairy tales, Aladdin’s genie was a servant, but not in the **likeness of men**.

i. The word for **likeness** here *may* refer to merely the outward form of something. While Jesus did have the outward form of humanity, the outward form reflected His true humanity, which was added to His deity.

ii. “It was a likeness, but a real likeness, no mere phantom humanity as the Docetic Gnostics held.” (Robertson)

5. (8) *The extent of Jesus’ self-emptying.*

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross.

a. **He humbled Himself and became obedient:** Jesus **humbled Himself** when He **became obedient**. This was something that Jesus could only experience by coming down from the throne of heaven and becoming a man. When God sits enthroned in heaven’s glory, there

is no one He obeys. Jesus had to leave heaven's glory and be **found in appearance as a man** in order to become **obedient**.

i. One key to Jesus' obedience on earth was the endurance of suffering. This again was something He could only learn by experience after the incarnation. As it is written: *though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered (Heb 5:8)*.

ii. Indeed, **He humbled Himself**.

- He was humble in that he took the form of a man, and not a more glorious creature like an angel.
- He was humble in that He was born into an obscure, oppressed place.
- He was humble in that He was born into poverty among a despised people.
- He was humble in that He was born as a child instead of appearing as a man.
- He was humble in submitting to the obedience appropriate to a child in a household.
- He was humble in learning and practicing a trade – and a humble trade of a builder.
- He was humble in the long wait until He launched out into public ministry.
- He was humble in the companions and disciples He chose.
- He was humble in the audience He appealed to and the way He taught.
- He was humble in the temptations He allowed and endured.
- He was humble in the weakness, hunger, thirst, and tiredness He endured.

- He was humble in His total obedience to His Heavenly Father.
- He was humble in His submission to the Holy Spirit.
- He was humble in choosing and submitting to the death of the cross.
- He was humble in the agony of His death.
- He was humble in the shame, mocking, and public humiliation of His death.
- He was humble in enduring the spiritual agony of His sacrifice on the cross.

iii. We can imagine that it was possible for the Son of God to become man and pay for the sins of the world without this great humiliation. He might have added the humanity of a 33-year old man to his deity. He might have appeared before man only in His transfigured glory, and taught men what they needed to hear from Him. He might have suffered for the sins of man in a hidden place of the earth far from the eyes of man, or on the dark side of the moon for that matter. Yet He did not; **He humbled Himself**, and did it for the surpassing greatness of our salvation and His work for us.

b. To the point of death, even the death of the cross: This states the extent of Jesus' humility and obedience.

i. Crucifixion was such a shameful death that it was not permitted for Roman citizens (such as the people of Philippi). A victim of crucifixion was considered by the Jews to be particularly cursed by God (Deu 21:23 and Gal 3:13).

ii. Robertson called the **death of the cross** "The bottom rung in the ladder from the Throne of God.

Jesus came all the way down to the most despised death of all, a condemned criminal on the accursed cross.”

iii. **Even the death of the cross** shows that there is no limit to what God will do to demonstrate His love and saving power to man; this was and forever will be the ultimate. “What must sin have been in the sight of God, when it required such abasement in Jesus Christ to make an atonement for it, and *undo* its influence and malignity!” (Clarke)

iv. “The lower he stoops to save us, the higher we ought to lift him in our adoring reverence. Blessed be his name, he stoops, and stoops, and stoops, and, when he reaches our level, and becomes man, he still stoops, and stoops, and stoops lower and deeper yet.” (Spurgeon)

c. **Even the death of the cross:** All of this was a great display of the power of Jesus. Remember that because of Paul’s past experience among the Philippians, they were tempted to think of God’s *power* as being expressed only in exaltation and deliverance and not in terms of glorifying God through humble service and endurance.

i. In this, Paul reminded the Philippians that his current place of humble circumstances (his Roman imprisonment) could still show forth the glory and power of God, even as Jesus did in His humility.

C. Jesus, the ultimate example of exaltation after humility.

1. (9) *The exaltation of Jesus Christ.*

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

a. **Therefore God has also highly exalted Him:** This is the general heading for the material in the next three

verses. These words describe how God has exalted Jesus. Indeed,

highly exalted could also be translated “super exalted.”

i. “The Greek elegancy imports superexalted, or exalted with all exaltation.” (Poole)

ii. “Now, just pause over this thought – that Christ did not crown himself, but that his Father crowned him; that he did not elevate himself to the throne of majesty, but that his Father lifted him there, and placed him on his throne.” (Spurgeon)

b. Given Him the name which is above every name:

This goes beyond giving Jesus the Divine name Yahweh. When we consider the Hebrew concept of **the name**, it also implies that God declares that Jesus has a *character* and *person* above all.

i. This verse, with its clear statement of Jesus’ deity, is powerful ammunition against those who deny the deity of Jesus Christ. There is no higher name than Yahweh, and Jesus has that **name**.

2. (10-11) The subjection of the whole creation to Jesus.

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

a. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow: Not only is Jesus exalted by the Father, but the whole world is brought into submission to the Son.

i. “Paul does not imply by this a universal salvation, but means that every personal being will ultimately confess Christ’s lordship, either with joyful faith or with resentment and despair.” (Kent)

b. Those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth: This conveys the absolute totality of all creation recognizing the superiority of Jesus Christ.

i. In this, Paul draws on the idea of Isa 45:23 : *I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath.* Notice that in Isaiah, it is to Yahweh that all knees bow and tongues confess. In Philippians it is to Jesus, showing that Jesus *is* Yahweh.

ii. **Those under the earth:** "Either the dead, who are hid in the earth, and shall be raised by the power of Christ... or, devils, and wicked souls." (Poole)

c. Every knee should bow... every tongue should confess: The combination of **tongues confessing** and **knees bowing** gives evidence that the idea is a complete submission to Jesus, both in word and in action, and one that is required of all.

i. The totality of this recognition of Jesus' deity and exaltation has caused many to envision this happening in a formal way after the final judgment, when every creature in heaven and hell is required to bow their knees and make the confession **that Jesus Christ is Lord.**

d. That Jesus Christ is Lord: From this we can say that there is a sense in which Jesus *returned* to heaven with more than He had than when He *left* heaven. Not only did He return with His humanity still added to his deity (although a resurrected humanity), He also returned with the recognition planted among men of who He was and the worship He deserved - something unknown until the Incarnation and the full revelation of His person and work.

i. "He has always (in Paul's view) shared in the Divine nature. But it is only as the result of His Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection and Exaltation that He *appears to men* as on an equality with God, that He is *worshipped by them* in the way in which Jehovah is worshipped." (Kennedy)

ii. "He might have used the miraculous powers inherent in His Divine nature in such a way as to compel men, without further ado, to worship Him as God. Instead of that He was willing to attain this high dignity by the path of humiliation, suffering and death." (Kennedy)

iii. All this must be seen in reference to the humiliation described in Php 2:6-8; our tendency is to long for the exaltation, but to forsake the humiliation.

e. **Jesus Christ is Lord:** The confession of Jesus Christ as **Lord** reminds us to consider the great significance of this word *kurios*, especially as it was understood by the early church, who used the LXX as their Bible - where *kurios* was consistently used to translate the tetragrammaton, standing for the name *Yahweh*.

i. We also should not miss the significance that at a later time in the Roman Empire, all residents of the Empire were required to swear an oath of allegiance to the Emperor, declaring that *Caesar is Lord*, and burning a pinch of incense to an image of the emperor. Though the Roman state saw this only as a display of political allegiance, Christians rightly interpreted it as idolatry - and refused to participate, often paying with their lives.

ii. Paul has no doubt who is really Lord - not the Caesar whom he will stand trial before; *Caesar* may

be a high name, but it is not the name above all names, the name which belongs to Jesus Christ!

f. **Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father:** Remember that Paul did not give this description of Jesus in Php 2:5-11 simply for the theological education of the Philippians.

- He gave it to equip them to endure the hardship they were experiencing.
- He gave it help them to understand Paul's hardships.
- He gave it to help them to practice real Christian unity in the midst of hard times.

i. This picture of Jesus has helped them to understand how to assess the ministry of Paul, which seemed weak at the present time.

ii. This picture helped them to understand the context of God's revelation of power - how God delights to show His power through humble actions.

iii. This picture has equipped them to act in a way towards each other that will promote unity in the body of Christ.

iv. This picture has shown them how to follow Jesus' pattern of patient, humble obedience - something Paul will call them to continue in the following verses.

D. Paul's exhortation to the Philippians.

1. (12) Working out your own salvation.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

- a. **Therefore... as you have always obeyed:** We should not miss the connection between the obedience

Jesus showed (Php 2:8) and the obedience Paul expected of Christians as followers of Jesus (Php 2:12).

b. **Work out your own salvation:** We know that Paul did *not* mean “work so as to earn your own salvation.” Such a statement would contradict the whole of Paul’s gospel. What Paul *did* mean is to call the Philippians to put forth real effort into their Christian lives. This is not to **work** their salvation in the sense of accomplishing it, but to **work out** their salvation - to see it evident in every area of their lives, to *activate* this salvation God freely gave them.

i. Therefore, “These words, as they stand in the New Testament, contain no exhortation to all men, but are directed to the people of God. They are not intended as an exhortation to the unconverted; they are, as we find them in the epistle, beyond all question addressed to those who are already saved through a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Spurgeon)

c. **Work out your own salvation:** There is a sense in which our salvation is complete, in the sense that Jesus has done a complete work *for* us. Still there is also a sense in which our salvation is incomplete, in that it is not yet a complete work *in* us.

i. “The believer must finish, must carry to conclusion, must apply to its fullest consequences what is already given by God in principle... He must *work out* what God in His grace has *worked in*.” (Muller)

ii. “Some professors appear to have imbibed the notion that the grace of God is a kind of opium with which men may drug themselves into slumber, and their passion for strong doses of sleepy doctrine grows with that which it feeds on. ‘God works in us,’ say they, ‘therefore there is nothing for us to do.’ Bad reasoning, false conclusion. God works, says the text;

therefore we must work out because God works in.”
(Spurgeon)

iii. “He exhorts as if he were an Arminian in addressing men. He prays as if he were a Calvinist in addressing God and feels no inconsistency in the two attitudes. Paul makes no attempt to reconcile divine sovereignty and human free agency, but boldly proclaims both.” (Robertson)

d. **Your own salvation:** This tells us to give attention to our **own salvation**. Sometimes we show great concern for the work of God in others, and not enough for His work in us. We should care about the souls of others, but this care must begin with our own soul.

e. **With fear and trembling:** Paul’s idea was not that we should live our Christian lives with a constant sense of fear and terror, but that we should live with a fear of failing to **work out your own salvation**.

i. We work out our salvation with **fear and trembling**; but it doesn’t have to be the fear of hell or damnation. It may instead be the righteous and awe-filled reverence of God every believer should have. It doesn’t have to be the **trembling** of a guilty sinner; it should instead be the joyful **trembling** of an encounter with the glory of God.

f. **Now much more in my absence:** In context, Paul asked for this Christian **work** ethic (not a *works* ethic) to be promoted all the more because of his **absence**.

2. (13) *God’s work in you.*

For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

a. **For it is God who works in you:** Paul here gave the reason *why* Christians must *work out their salvation with fear and trembling* - because **God** is working in them.

i. We take comfort in it: **God who works in you.** "Grace all-sufficient dwells in you, believer. There is a living well within you springing up; use the bucket, then; keep on drawing; you will never exhaust it; there is a living source within." (Spurgeon)

b. **God... works in you:** The idea is that since God has done and is doing a work in the Christian, the Christian therefore has a greater responsibility to work diligently with fear and trembling regarding his own salvation and walk with the Lord. God's work in us *increases* our responsibility; it doesn't *lessen* it in any way.

i. Those that take God's sovereignty and working and use them as an excuse for inaction and lethargy are like the wicked and lazy servant of

Mat 25:24-30.

ii. Those that are really God's servants use their understanding of His sovereignty and omnipotence as a motivation for greater, more dedicated service to Him.

c. **Both to will and to do:** God's work in us extends to the transformation of our **will**, as well as changing our actions (**to do**). Yet in light of the original exhortation to *work out your own salvation*, this is not a passive transaction.

d. **For His good pleasure:** This is the motive behind God's work in our life. He does so because it gives Him **pleasure** to do it.

3. (14-16) *Practical ways to obey Paul's exhortation.*

Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I

may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

a. Do all things without complaining and disputing:

There is a good deal of dispute among commentators as to if this **complaining and disputing** refers to problems among the Philippians (such as mentioned in Php 2:1-4) or if this refers to their attitude towards God. Perhaps they resented God because of their present conflict (Php 1:27-30).

i. Because Paul specifically used terms that were used to describe Israel's complaining towards God during the Exodus, it is probably best to see the **complaining and disputing** as including their attitude towards God. Spurgeon gives three examples of things we must not murmur against:

- The Providence of God.
- One another.
- The ungodly world.

ii. In this command, the emphasis falls on the words **all things**, which is actually the first word of the verse in the ancient Greek text.

iii. "Dispute not with God; let him do what seemeth him good. Dispute not with your fellow Christians, raise not railing accusations against them. When Calvin was told that Luther had spoken ill of him, he said, 'Let Luther call me devil if he please, I will never say of him but that he is a most dear and valiant servant of the Lord.' Raise not intricate and knotty points by way of controversy." (Spurgeon)

b. That you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault: Through the display of a non-complaining spirit, we show ourselves to be true followers of God.

i. **Harmless** can have the thought of “pure” or “unalloyed.” But the translation as *harmless* is also justified (it is the same word used in Mat 10:16).

ii. “‘Be ye blameless *and harmless*,’ says the apostle. The Greek word might be translated ‘hornless,’ as if ye were to be creatures not only that do no harm, but *could not do any*; like sheep that not only *will not* devour, but *cannot* devour, for it were contrary to their nature; for they have no teeth with which to bite, no fangs with which to sting, no poison with which to slay.” (Spurgeon)

c. **In the midst of a crooked and perverse generation:** This seems to refer back to Deu 32:5 : *They have corrupted themselves; they are not His children, because of their blemish: A perverse and crooked generation.* Paul meant that modern Christians should not be like rebellious Israel, who were constantly **complaining and disputing** with God during the wilderness sojourn.

d. **Among whom you shine as lights in the world:** This is not an encouragement to do something; it is a simple statement of fact. Christians *are lights in the world*; the only question is, “How brightly do they shine?”

i. “Not *lights* merely, but **luminaries**, *heavenly bodies*. But this can hardly be satisfactorily given in an English version.” (Alford)

ii. We are to fulfill our place **as lights in the world:**

- Lights are used to make things evident.
- Lights are used to guide.
- Lights are used as a warning.
- Lights are used to bring cheer.

- Lights are used to make things safe.

iii. Paul knew that the lights were in a bad place. Instead of excusing the lights for not shining, Paul knew that their position made it all the more important that they shine. Being in a dark place is a greater incentive to shine.

e. **Holding fast the word of life:** The phrase **holding fast** could also be translated *holding forth*. Both meanings are true and Paul could have meant it in this dual sense. We *hold fast* - in the sense of holding strong - **the word of life**, and we also *hold forth* **the word of life**.

f. **So that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain:** The idea that Paul's work might some how end up to be in vain was a troublesome thought to him. He knew that his work really abided in *people*, so that if those people did not continue on strong with the Lord, there was a sense in which his own ministry was **in vain**.

g. **In the day of Christ:** Paul looked forward to **the day of Christ**, and on that day he wanted to see and to know that his work was fruitful. This was something he could only be assured of if the Philippians continued to walk with the Lord.

i. This is the true heart of a shepherd: to have few burdens for one's self, but many for others; to not be content with one's own relationship with God, but also longing to see others walking with the Lord.

4. (17-18) *Paul as an example of his own exhortation.*

Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

a. **Poured out as a drink offering:** Paul here alluded to a practice among both Jews and pagans in their sacrifices. They often poured out wine (or sometimes perfume) either beside (as in the Jewish practice) or upon (as in the pagan practice) an animal that was sacrificed to God or pagan gods.

i. This is the **drink offering**, which accompanied another sacrifice, that is mentioned in Num 15:4-5; Num 28:7.

ii. The grammar of **I am being poured out** is in the *present* tense. With this Paul indicated the possibility that his execution may be imminent.

b. **On the sacrifice and service of your faith:** The ancient Greek word translated **service** is *leiturgia*. It meant, "Service to God or His cause... any priestly action or sacred performance." (Muller) Therefore, in this verse we have a *sacrifice*, a *priest*, and an *accompanying libation* that makes the sacrifice even more precious.

i. Since **the sacrifice and service** were connected with the **faith** of the Philippians, it is best to see Paul's picture describing them as the "priests" and their faith as the "sacrifice," to which Paul added (and thereby enriched) his martyrdom as a drink offering.

c. **I am glad and rejoice... you also be glad and rejoice with me:** Paul looked forward to what might be his imminent martyrdom, and expected the Philippians to **be glad and rejoice with** him. Paul wasn't being morbid here, asking the Philippians to take joy in something as depressing as his death. Yet he did ask the Philippians to see his death as something that would bring glory to God. This is a theme repeated from Php 1:20.

i. Paul's life was going to be a sacrifice for Jesus Christ, either in life or in death. This was a source of gladness and joy for Paul, and he wants the Philippians to adopt the same attitude.

ii. Again, we come to the consistent theme of Philippians: *joy*. But this is joy based not on circumstances (quite the opposite, really), but based in the fact of a life totally committed to Jesus Christ.

E. Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

1. (19-22) Paul writes about Timothy and his soon anticipated visit.

But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with *his* father he served with me in the gospel.

a. **But I trust in the Lord:** This showed Paul's heart of true reliance upon the Lord. He wanted to see Timothy among the Philippians, but recognized that it would happen God's way and in God's timing.

b. **That I also may be encouraged when I know your state:** Paul didn't expect problems from the Philippians, as if they were one of his problem churches. Instead, he expected that he would be **encouraged when I know your state**.

i. Contrast this with the attitude Paul conveyed to the Corinthian church in 2Co 13:2-3. The Corinthian church had much worse problems than the Philippian church had.

c. **Who will sincerely care for your state:** When Paul sent Timothy, he sent his best, a man who showed a

pastor's heart and had greater concern for his sheep than for himself.

i. Paul recognized just how rare this kind of heart was when he observed **all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.**

2. (23-24) *Paul repeats his desire to come to the Philippians in person, not only to send Timothy to them.*

Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly.

a. **I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly:** Perhaps Paul was being careful to avoid the accusation, "Paul wants to send Timothy because he really doesn't want to be here himself." He clearly told the Philippians that he also wanted to come.

3. (25-26) *Paul writes about Epaphroditus and his coming to the Philippians.*

Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.

a. **I considered it necessary to send to you:** This undoubtedly meant that Epaphroditus took this letter to the Philippians. It seems that **Epaphroditus** came to Paul from the Philippians as a messenger and became sick while he was with Paul.

b. **My brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier:** Paul gave these important titles to Epaphroditus. He was a man Paul valued as a partner in the work of ministry.

i. There are three special relationships here mentioned:

- **Brother** speaks of a relationship to be enjoyed.
- **Worker** speaks of a job to be done.
- **Soldier** speaks of a battle to be fought.

c. **Your messenger and the one who ministered to my need:** This means that Epaphroditus brought a gift of financial support from the Philippians to Paul (Php 4:18).

i. **Ministered** has in it the idea of a priestly service. When Epaphroditus brought the support money from the Philippians to Paul in Rome, he brought a *sacrifice*.

d. **Because you had heard that he was sick:** Epaphroditus was concerned because the Philippians learned of his sickness and worried about him. The return of Epaphroditus would give them peace of mind that their valued brother was in good condition.

i. It would also help Epaphroditus because **he was longing for you all and was distressed**. He greatly longed to see the Philippian Christians.

4. (27) *Epaphroditus' sickness and his recovery.*

For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

a. **For indeed he was sick almost unto death:** The sickness of Epaphroditus was no small thing; it was **almost unto death**. Yet **God had mercy on him** and he recovered.

i. There is nothing in the text to indicate that this was a miraculous healing, but Paul still saw God's hand of

mercy in Epaphroditus' recovery.

b. **Lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow**: God's mercy to Epaphroditus was also mercy to Paul. If Epaphroditus had died, Paul would have had **sorrow upon sorrow** because a valued brother, worker, and soldier for Christ was no longer on this earth. He would also have **sorrow upon sorrow** because Epaphroditus became sick when he came on behalf of the Philippians to minister to Paul's material and spiritual needs while Paul was in prison in Rome.

5. (28-30) *Paul's instructions to the Philippians on how to receive Epaphroditus as he returns to them.*

Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.

a. **I sent him the more eagerly**: Paul was eager to reunite the Philippians with their beloved brother Epaphroditus, and reminded the Philippians to give him proper recognition when he returned (**hold such men in esteem**).

i. Probably, the Philippians sent Epaphroditus not only as a messenger, but also to be a personal attendant to Paul on behalf of the Philippians. When illness prevented Epaphroditus from doing this, he may have seemed like a failure (perhaps even a malingerer) in the eyes of the Philippians. Paul assured them this was not the case; in fact, it was just the opposite - Epaphroditus served above and beyond the call of duty.

b. **Because for the work of Christ he came close to death:** It was **for the work of Christ** that Epaphroditus came **close to death**. Even though his **work** was mostly that of being a messenger and not anything particularly spiritual, it was still **the work of Christ**.

c. **Not regarding his life:** The willingness to put the **work of Christ** first and his own personal safety and concern second displayed the noble heart of Epaphroditus.

i. The ancient Greek phrase **not regarding his life** uses a gambler's word that meant to risk everything on the roll of the dice. Paul wrote that for the sake of Jesus Christ, Epaphroditus was willing to gamble everything.

ii. In the days of the Early Church there was an association of men and women who called themselves *the gamblers*, taken from this same ancient Greek word used in **not regarding his life**. It was their aim to visit the prisoners and the sick, especially those who were ill with dangerous and infectious diseases. Often, when a plague struck a city, the heathen threw the dead bodies into the streets and fled in terror. But the *gamblers* buried the dead and helped the sick the best they could, and so risked their lives to show the love of Jesus.

iii. "It seems plain from this expression that Epaphroditus' illness was the consequence not of persecution but of over-exertion." (Lightfoot)

d. **To supply what was lacking in your service toward me:** Epaphroditus did this by actually *bringing* the support that the Philippians gave. There was a *lack* in all the Philippians' generosity and good intentions until the gift finally made its way to Paul's need.

i. We should have the heart that there is something **lacking** in our **service** until the job is done. We should not be satisfied with good intentions or a half-done job.

Righteousness Through Faith in Christ

Php 3:1 For the rest my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you truly is not tiresome to me, but safe for you.

Php 3:2 Look out for the dogs, look out for the evil workers, look out for the concision party .

Php 3:3 For we are the circumcision, the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, and who glory in Christ Jesus, and who do not trust in flesh.

Php 3:4 Though I also might have trust in flesh; if any other thinks to trust in flesh, I more;

Php 3:5 in circumcision, the eighth day, of the race of Israel, the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; according to Law, a Pharisee;

Php 3:6 according to zeal, persecuting the church; according to righteousness in Law, being blameless.

Php 3:7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss because of Christ.

Php 3:8 But, nay, rather I also count all things to be loss because of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them to be trash, that I might gain Christ

Php 3:9 and be found in Him; not having my own righteousness of Law, but through the faith of Christ, having the righteousness of God on faith,

Php 3:10 to know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, having been conformed to His death,

Php 3:11 if somehow I may attain to a resurrection out of the dead.

Straining Toward the Goal

Php 3:12 Not that I already received or already have been perfected, but I press on, if I also may lay hold, inasmuch as I also was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Php 3:13 Brothers, I do not count myself to have laid hold, but one thing I do , forgetting the things behind, and stretching forward to those things before,

Php 3:14 I press on after the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Php 3:15 Then as many as are perfect, let us be of this mind; and if you think anything differently, God will also reveal this to you.

Php 3:16 Yet as to where we have arrived, walk by the same rule, being of the same mind.

Php 3:17 Be fellow-imitators of me, brothers, and consider those walking this way, even as you have us for a pattern.

Php 3:18 For many walk as the enemies of the cross of Christ, of whom I often told you, and now even weeping I say it,

Php 3:19 whose end is destruction, whose god is the belly, and who glory in their shame, those who mind earthly things.

Php 3:20 For our citizenship is in Heaven, from where we also wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

Php 3:21 who will transform our body of humiliation, for it to be conformed to His body of glory, according to the working of His power, even to put all things under Himself.

Philippians 3:1-21

Philippians 3 - Leaving Law and Pressing On to Jesus

A. The futility of a relationship with God based on the principle of law.

1. (1-2) Warning against the influence of legalistic Jews.

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!

a. **Finally:** This didn't mean that Paul was almost finished; Paul wrote here as many preachers speak. Yet we should expect some sort of transition in the letter with the word **finally**.

i. "Paul's 'finally' here is not the 'finally' of the present day preacher. He has another 'finally' in 4:8. He does not mean by this that he is about to close the letter. The words translated by the word 'finally' are literally 'as for the rest.'" (Wuest)

b. **Rejoice in the Lord:** This is a fitting theme for the whole letter. Paul shared with the Philippians the principle of being able to rejoice **in the Lord** - not in circumstances or in situations, but **in the Lord** who works all things together for good.

i. This abiding joy is fitting for the believer because it shows that we really do trust in a God whom we really believe is in control. When we believe this, it isn't any surprise that we are then filled with joy.

ii. **Rejoice in the Lord:** "The entire phrase may be the Christian equivalent of the Old Testament exclamation, *Hallelujah*." (Martin)

iii. "*It is a duty for us to cultivate this joy*. We must steadfastly arrest any tendency to murmur and complain; to find fault with God's dealings; or to seek to elicit sympathy. We must as much resist the

temptation to depression and melancholy as we would to any form of sin.” (Meyer)

c. **For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe:** Paul assured the Philippians that he didn’t mind reminding them of the same things because it was for their safety.

i. Paul did not mind reminding them because he was passionately concerned about certain dangers, and he would speak out strongly against them. “This outburst is very remarkable, for its vehemence is so unlike the tone of the rest of the letter. That is calm, joyous, bright, but this is stormy and impassioned, full of flashing and scathing words.” (Maclaren)

d. **Beware of dogs:** This was a harsh reference to the troublemaking legalists who attempted to deceive the Philippians. “**Dogs**” is exactly the term of contempt Jews would use against Gentiles. Paul said a lot by using this word against these Jewish-influenced legalists.

i. Muller quoting Lightfoot: “The herds of dogs which prowl about Eastern cities, without a home and without an owner, feeding on the refuse and filth of the streets, quarreling among themselves, and attacking the passer-by, explain the applications of the image.”

ii. “We are bidden, therefore, to beware of men of a quarrelsome and contentious spirit, who under the guise of religion hide impure and unclean things; and who are not only defiled, but defiling in their influence.” (Meyer)

e. **Beware of evil workers:** This describes both what these legalists *do* (working **evil**), but was also a word against their emphasis on righteousness with God by

works. Paul would admit that they have a concern for works, but they were **evil workers**.

i. **Evil workers**: "These people are the 'Cranks' of our Churches; they introduce fads and hobbies; they exaggerate the importance of trifles; they catch up every new theory and vagary, and follow it to the detriment of truth and love." (Meyer)

f. **Beware of the mutilation**: Here is another harsh reference to the insistence of these Jewish legalists on requiring circumcision for Gentiles who wanted to become Christians. This was all done with the idea that someone must become a Jew *first* before they could become a Christian.

i. "They did not deny that Jesus was the Messiah, or that His Gospel was the power of God unto salvation, but they insisted that the Gentile converts could only come to the fullness of Gospel privilege through the Law of Moses." (Meyer)

ii. However, Paul did not see their insistence on circumcision as something beautiful or noble; he regarded it as an ugly example of **mutilation**. Maclaren imagines Paul saying it like this: "I will not call them the circumcision, they have not been circumcised, they have only been gashed and mutilated, it has been a mere fleshly maiming."

iii. Martin on *the mutilation*: "By a pun, he mockingly calls it a mere cutting, *katatome*, i.e. mutilation of the body on a par with pagan practices forbidden in Lev 21:5."

2. (3-4) *Paul defines the true circumcision.*

For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in

the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so:

a. **For we are the circumcision:** These Jewish legalists considered themselves the ones truly circumcised and right with God. But Paul declared that he and his followers were the *true* **circumcision**.

b. **Who worship God in the Spirit:** This defines the true circumcision. They **worship God in the Spirit**, as opposed to the fleshly and external worship emphasized by these legalists.

i. "The word 'worship' is the translation of the Greek word referring to the service of Jehovah by His peculiar people, the Jews. A Jew would be scandalized by the application of this word to a Gentile." (Wuest)

c. **Rejoice in Christ Jesus:** This also characterizes those of the true circumcision. Their joy is not found in their own ability to be justified by the law or by their law-keeping. Jesus and Jesus alone is their joy.

d. **Have no confidence in the flesh:** This is a third characteristic of the true circumcision. They do not trust in their own ability to be righteous before God through external works (**the flesh**), but their only confidence is in Jesus.

e. **I also might have confidence in the flesh... I more so:** Paul knew that he was more qualified to be justified by the keeping of the law than any of his present legalistic opponents were.

i. Curiously, often those who promote the idea of having confidence in the flesh are the same ones who are the least qualified to have such confidence. This is because of the principle Paul explains in Col 2:23 - *These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of*

the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

3. (5-6) Paul's reasons why he might have confidence in the flesh.

Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

a. **Circumcised the eighth day...** : Paul first listed four things that were his possessions by birth, all reasons why he might have confidence in the flesh.

- Paul was **circumcised the eighth day** in accordance with Lev 12:3.

- Paul was **of the stock of Israel**, a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and therefore an heir to God's covenant with them.

- Paul was of **the tribe of Benjamin**, a distinguished tribe. Benjamin was distinguished by the fact that it gave Israel her first king, Saul (1Sa 9:1-2). It was the tribe that aligned itself with faithful Judah when Israel divided into two nations at the time of Rehoboam (1Ki 12:21). It was also the tribe that had the city of Jerusalem within its boundaries (Jdg 1:21).

- Paul was **a Hebrew of the Hebrews**. This contrasted him with the Jews who embraced Greek culture as it spread through the Mediterranean. In that time, many Jews became ashamed of their Jewishness and tried to live and act as much like Greeks as they could, sometimes even to the point of having their circumcision cosmetically restored or hidden so they could enjoy the Roman public baths without being noticed as Jews. In

contrast, Paul was raised by his parents as **a Hebrew of the Hebrews**.

b. **Concerning the law:** Paul then listed three things that were his by personal choice and conviction, all reasons why he might have confidence in the flesh.

- Paul was **concerning the law, a Pharisee**. This tells us that among an elite people (the Jews), Paul was of an elite sect (the Pharisees), who were noted for their scrupulous devotion to the law of God. "There were not very many Pharisees, never more than six thousand, but they were the spiritual athletes of Judaism. Their very name means *The Separated Ones*. They had separated themselves off from all common life and from all common tasks in order to make it the one aim of their lives to keep every smallest detail of the Law." (Barclay) The concern that Pharisees had for keeping the law is reflected in passages like Mat 23:23.

- **Concerning zeal, persecuting the church**. Paul was not merely an *intellectual* opponent of perceived heresies against Judaism; he was also an active fighter against them - even in his blindness to God. Paul's observation that the Jews of his day *have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge* (Rom 10:2) was true of his own life before God confronted him on the road to Damascus.

- **Concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless**. This shows that Paul achieved the standard of righteousness which was accepted among the men of his day - though this standard fell short of God's holy standard. Because of how the law was interpreted and taught, there were those of that day who were deceived into thinking that they really were **blameless**, like the rich young ruler (Luk 18:18-23).

i. In summary, if *anyone* could lay claim to pleasing God by law-keeping and the works of the flesh, it was Paul. He was far more qualified than his legalizing opponents were to make such a claim.

4. (7) *Paul rejects all confidence in the flesh.*

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.

a. **These I have counted loss for Christ:** Any of the corrupting teachers Paul warned against would be proud to claim Paul's pedigree. Yet Paul made it plain:

these things I have counted loss for Christ.

i. "The word 'gain' is plural in the Greek, namely, 'gains.'... 'Loss' is singular. The various gains are all counted as one loss." (Wuest)

ii. "He was skilled in spiritual arithmetic, and very careful in his reckoning. He cast up his accounts with caution, and observed with a diligent eye his losses and his gains." (Spurgeon)

b. **I have counted loss:** Paul **counted** these things loss. It wasn't so much that they were a loss by their very character, as much as he chose to *regard* them as **loss**.

i. They were **counted loss** not so much because they were harmful to Paul, but because these things were ways in which Paul sought to please God in the energies of the flesh. Before Paul became a Christian, he thought all these things made him a success in the effort to please God by works.

ii. We can say that Paul's attitude was the same that Jesus described in the parable of the pearl of great price (Mat 13:45-46).

B. Paul's utter confidence in a living relationship with Jesus Christ.

1. (8) Paul's gain in Jesus Christ.

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

a. **Yet indeed I also count all things loss:** Paul did not only count his religious pedigree as a loss; he counted **all things loss** - but he counted them as a loss in view of **the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus**.

i. **Yet indeed:** "The translation of five particles, which latter are literally translated, 'yea, indeed, therefore, at least, even,' and show the force and passion of Paul's conviction." (Wuest)

ii. It wasn't so much that those things were worthless in themselves, but compared to the greatness of **the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus**, they really were nothing.

iii. Paul here put a *personal relationship with Jesus Christ* at the very center of the Christian's life. He joyfully accepted the loss of all other things for the greatness of this personal relationship.

iv. In Php 3:7 Paul said that he *counted*; in this verse he said **I also count**. This first counting was at his conversion; the second – some 30 years later – was in his Roman prison. After all he had experienced, he still counted it worthy to give everything up for the sake of following Jesus.

v. "After twenty years or more of experience Paul had an opportunity of revising his balance-sheet, and looking again at his estimates, and seeing whether or

not his counting was correct. What was the issue of his latest search? How do matters stand at his last stocktaking? He exclaims with very special emphasis, 'Yea doubtless; and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.'" (Spurgeon)

b. For whom I have suffered the loss of all things:

This counting loss was not merely an internal spiritual exercise. Paul had indeed **suffered the loss of all things** that he might gain Christ.

i. This is demonstrated by the place and circumstances under which Paul wrote this letter – a Roman prison, where he truly could say that he had **suffered the loss of all things**.

c. Count them as rubbish: Paul here used strong language. Literally, Paul considered them as excrement - as dung; not only as worthless, but as offensive.

i. The ancient Greek word for **rubbish** had one of two uses. It could describe excrement from the body or table scraps that were fit only to be thrown to the dogs. We may suppose that Paul would be comfortable with either meaning in this context.

ii. "The word [**rubbish**] means the vilest dross or *refuse* of any thing; the worst excrement. The word shows how utterly insignificant and unavailing, in point of salvation, the apostle esteemed every thing but the Gospel of Jesus." (Clarke)

2. (9) The spiritual benefits of his gain in Jesus Christ.

And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

a. **And be found in Him:** Because Paul was **in Him**, he could renounce his **own righteousness** and live by the **righteousness which is from God by faith**. The foundation for his spiritual life was in what Jesus had done for him and not in what he had done, was doing, or would do for Jesus in the future.

b. **The righteousness which is from God by faith:** Paul here exposed the great difference between the legal relationship stressed by his opponents and his personal connection with Jesus Christ. The difference is between living and trusting in your own righteousness and living and trusting in God's righteousness given **through faith in Christ**.

i. "He disowns his own righteousness as eagerly as other men disown their sins, and he highly esteems the righteousness which Christ has wrought out for us, which becomes ours by faith." (Spurgeon)

3. (10-11) *Paul's experience of a personal relationship with Jesus.*

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

a. **That I may know Him:** This was the simple plea of Paul's heart. It was a plea unknown to the legalist, who must necessarily focus on his own performance and status to find some kind of peace with God. But Paul wanted Jesus, not self.

i. To know Jesus is not the same as knowing His historical life; it is not the same as knowing correct doctrines regarding Jesus; it is not the same as knowing His moral example, and it is not the same as knowing His great work on our behalf.

- We can say that we know someone because we recognize him: because we can distinguish what is different about him compared to other people.
- We can say that we know someone because we are acquainted with what he does; we know the baker because we get our bread from him.
- We can say that we know someone because we actually converse with him; we are on speaking terms with that person.
- We can say that we know someone because we spend time in his house and with his family.
- We can say that we know someone because we have committed our life to him and live with him every day, sharing every circumstance as in a marriage.
- Yet beyond all this, there is a way of knowing Jesus Christ that includes all of these yet goes beyond them.

ii. "They tell me he is a refiner, that he cleanses from spots; he has washed me in his precious blood, and to that extent I know him. They tell me that he clothes the naked; he hath covered me with a garment of righteousness, and to that extent I know him. They tell me that he is a breaker, and that he breaks fetters, he has set my soul at liberty, and therefore I know him. They tell me that he is a king and that he reigns over sin; he hath subdued my enemies beneath his feet, and I know him in that character. They tell me he is a shepherd: I know him for I am his sheep. They say he is a door: I have entered in through him, and I know him as a door. They say he is food: my spirit feeds on him as on the bread of

heaven, and, therefore, I know him as such.”
(Spurgeon)

b. **And the power of His resurrection:** Knowing Jesus means knowing this **power**, the new life that is imparted to us *now*, not when we die.

i. “He wants to know in an experiential way the power of Christ’s resurrection. That is, he wants to experience the same power that raised Christ from the dead surging through his own being, overcoming sin in his life and producing the Christian graces.”
(Wuest)

ii. “I do not think, however, that Paul is here thinking so much of the power displayed in the resurrection, as of the power which comes out of it, which may most properly be called, ‘the power of his resurrection.’ This the apostle desired to apprehend and to know.” (Spurgeon)

- The power of His resurrection is an *evidencing power*. It is the evidence and seal that everything Jesus did and said was true.

- The power of His resurrection is a *justifying power*. It is the receipt and proof that the sacrifice of the cross was accepted as payment in full.

- The power of His resurrection is a *life-giving power*. It means that those who are connected with Jesus Christ receive the same resurrection life.

- The power of His resurrection is a *consoling and comforting power*. It promises that our friends and loved ones who are dead in Christ live with Him.

c. **And the fellowship of His sufferings:** Knowing Jesus also means knowing this **fellowship of His sufferings**. It is all part of following Jesus and being *in* Christ. We can say that suffering is part of our heritage

as the children of God; we get to be part of the family of suffering: *If children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together (Rom 8:17).*

d. **Being conformed to His death:** This reminds us that being **in Christ** also means being “in” His death. These words had particular relevance to Paul who faced possible martyrdom.

e. **If, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead:** Paul was not morbidly focused on suffering and death in the Christian life. He saw that they were a necessary way to the goal of resurrection life right now and the ultimate resurrection from the dead.

i. This was a goal that was worth **any means** to Paul. The suffering was worth it, considering the greatness of the goal of **resurrection from the dead**.

ii. **I may attain:** Paul didn’t doubt that he was saved, but he did long mightily for the completion of his salvation through the resurrection of his body. It was something that he had not yet attained and longed for.

iii. Remember that Paul wrote this having experienced more suffering than we will ever experience, and he wrote it from the custody of Roman soldiers. This wasn’t merely theological theory and ideas, but a lived-out connection with God.

4. (12-14) *The future of Paul’s relationship with Jesus Christ.*

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended;

but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

a. **Not that I have already attained:** Paul wrote from such spiritual maturity and purity that we might expect he believed that he had conquered all spiritual difficulties and saw himself as having arrived at near perfection. Yet he assured us this was not so. There was no perfectionism in Paul.

i. Sadly, it is common for many Christian leaders to cultivate the attitude that they **have already attained**. Without saying the words, they put forth the image of constant triumph that gives the idea that they **have already attained** and are **already perfected**.

ii. "Brethren, it is a very healthy thing for us who are ministers to read a biography like that of M'Cheyne. Read that through, if you are a minister, and it will burst many of your windbags. You will find yourselves collapse most terribly. Take the life of Brainerd amongst the Indians, or of Baxter in our own land. Think of the holiness of George Herbert, the devoutness of Fletcher, or the zeal of Whitfield. Where do you find yourself after reading their lives? Might you not peep about to find a hiding-place for your insignificance?" (Spurgeon)

iii. "Just as a little child is a perfect human being, but still is far from perfect in all his development as man, so the true child of God is also perfect in all parts, although not yet perfect in all the stages of his development in faith." (Muller)

iv. "But while the work of Christ for us is perfect, and it were presumption to think of adding to it, the work

of the Holy Spirit in us is not perfect, it is continually carried on from day to day, and will need to be continued throughout the whole of our lives.” (Spurgeon)

b. **But I press on:** Because Paul realized that he had not arrived, there was only one option open for him. He had to **press on**. There was no turning back for Him.

i. When Spain led the world (in the 15th century), her coins reflected her national arrogance and were inscribed *Ne Plus Ultra* which meant “Nothing Further” - meaning that Spain was the ultimate in all the world. After the discovery of the New World, she realized that she was not the end of the world, so Spain changed the inscription on her coinage to *Plus Ultra* meaning “More Beyond.” In the same pattern, some Christian lives say, “Nothing Further” and others say “More Beyond.”

ii. This is where child-like faith meets real maturity. A child can’t wait to be bigger and always wants to be more mature.

iii. **But I press on** meant that Paul had put his hand to the plow and refused to look back (Luk 9:62).

c. **That I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me:** Paul pressed on for what Jesus wanted. His effort was put forth to do God’s will, not his own.

i. When Paul said, “**That I may lay hold,**” he used strong language. “The word ‘apprehend’ is from the same Greek word translated ‘attained,’ but with a preposition prefixed which means in its local force ‘down.’ He wants to catch hold of it and pull it down, like a football player who not only wants to catch his

man, but wants to pull him down and make him his own." (Wuest)

ii. Paul began this verse with the idea that Jesus Christ had laid hold of him. This is an important idea; yet sometimes Christians react to that idea by being passive. They suppose, "Jesus got a hold of me; so that is it now. I am a Christian and I am going to heaven." Paul showed a different attitude; he was determined to **lay hold** for that for which Jesus had **laid hold** of him. So one should ask, "Why did Jesus lay hold of Paul?"

- Jesus **laid hold** of Paul to make him a new man (Rom 6:4) – so Paul would **lay hold** of that and wanted to see the converting work of Jesus completely carried out in himself.

- Jesus **laid hold** of Paul to conform him into the image of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29) – so Paul would **lay hold** of that and wanted to see the nature of Jesus within himself.

- Jesus **laid hold** of Paul to make him a witness (Act 9:15) – so Paul would **lay hold** of both the experience of Jesus and to testify of that experience.

- Jesus **laid hold** of Paul to make him an instrument in the conversion of others (Act 9:15) – so Paul would **lay hold** of the work of bringing others to Jesus.

- Jesus **laid hold** of Paul to bring him into suffering (Act 9:16) – so Paul would **lay hold** of even that work of God in his life, wanting to know Jesus in the fellowship of His sufferings.

- Jesus **laid hold** of Paul that so that the Apostle might attain to the resurrection from the dead

(Php 3:11) – so Paul would **lay hold** of that heavenly hope.

d. **The prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus:** Paul was focused on one thing and would not let **those things which are behind** distract him from it. He pressed on for the **prize**.

i. We often let **those things which are behind** distract us, whether they be good things or bad things. Looking at what is in the past often keeps us from what God has for us in the future.

ii. It is a deception to live either in the past or in the future; God wants us to press on in the present, because the present is where eternity touches us now. Paul knew that a race is won only in the present moment, not in the past or in the future.

e. **I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus:** The prize is the **upward call of God**. The **prize** is the **call** itself, not the benefits that come from the call or any other thing. The prize is being able to run the race at all, working with God as a partner to do the work of His kingdom.

i. "It is a *high calling* because it comes from above, from God; the conception of it has emanated from His heart. It is a *high calling* because it is worthy of God. It is a *high calling* because it is so much above the ideals of men... And then this is a *high calling* because it summons us to where Christ sits at the right hand of God." (Meyer)

ii. Because it is such a glorious call, it is worth **reaching forward** for it. "The Greek word points out the strong exertions made in the *race*; every muscle and nerve is exerted, and he puts forth every particle

of his strength in *running*. He was running for life, and running for his life.” (Clarke)

f. **The upward call of God in Christ Jesus:** As everything else, this **upward call of God** is only **in Christ Jesus**. The legalists might say they followed the **upward call of God**, but they certainly didn’t do it **in Christ Jesus**; instead they did it in the efforts of their own flesh.

5. (15-16) *Paul exhorts the Philippians to adopt this same attitude.*

Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

a. **Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind:** Those who are really **mature** will have this **mind**. If they do not, Paul trusted that God would reveal the necessity of having it.

b. **God will reveal even this to you:** Paul had great trust in the ability of the Lord to deal with His own people. He didn’t have the attitude that if *he* failed to convince them, they would then never be convinced.

c. **Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule:** However, Paul would not allow a lack of understanding to excuse anyone from doing what he *did* know to be the Lord’s will. What we *don’t know* can never excuse us from failing to fulfill what we *do know* to do.

d. **Let us be of the same mind:** Part of doing what we do know is being **of the same mind**. This is a call to unity (a unity of truth, against the potential division brought in by the legalists) that looks back to Php 2:1-2.

i. The problems of unity facing the Philippians did not spring from great problems with carnality as was the case with the Corinthians (1Co 3:1-4). Rather it seemed to be a danger brought on by pressure, both from the outside (Php 1:27-30) and from the inside (Php 3:2). Paul wanted to make sure that this pressure pushed them *together* instead of driving them *apart*.

C. Walking the walk.

1. (17) *The good example of walking the walk: Paul and others.*

Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

a. **Join in following my example:** We shouldn't think that Paul was being egotistical here. He knew that he was not a sinless or perfect example, yet he was still a *good* example. He could say as he also did in 1Co 11:1 - *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*

i. We *need* concrete examples. While it is wrong to put our trust in any man, it is hypocritical for any Christian to say, "Do as I say, *not* as I do."

b. **And note those who so walk:** As well, Paul wasn't so proud to think that he was the *only* one who could be such an example. He told the Philippians to **note those who so walk** in the way he spoke of, and he noted that the Philippians had **us** as a pattern (instead of saying that Paul was the only pattern).

2. (18-19) *The bad examples: the **enemies of the cross.***

For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.*

a. **For many walk:** With great sadness, Paul realizes that there are many who **walk** in a manner contrary to what he teaches. He regards these people as **enemies of the cross of Christ**.

i. **The enemies of the cross** were really the opposite of the legalists, who celebrated their supposed liberty in Christ to the indulgence of their flesh.

ii. Paul had to contend with people like this in 1Co 6:12-20 and Romans 6, who thought that salvation comes without repentance and conversion, and who thought that as long as your soul was saved, it didn't matter what you did with your body.

iii. When we say that men are **enemies of the cross**, we do not mean that they are enemies of a physical representation of the cross. We mean that they are enemies of the Biblical truth of the atonement Jesus made for us on the cross and its ongoing power and effect in our life.

iv. These people were truly **enemies of the cross of Christ**, who did not want to follow Jesus by taking up His **cross** of self-denial (Mat 16:24-26).

b. **And now tell you even weeping:** The work and the end of these **enemies** was that they, in their disregard for God's holiness, gave ammunition to the legalist's accusation that Paul preached a cheap grace that required no commitment of the life. This is what grieved Paul so at their teaching.

i. Spurgeon thought that Paul wept for three reasons. First, on account of the *guilt* of these enemies of the cross of Christ. Second, on account of the *ill effects of their conduct*. Finally, on account of *their doom*.

ii. "I never read that the apostle wept when he was persecuted. Though they ploughed his back with furrows, I do believe that never a tear was seen to gush from his eye while the soldiers scourged him. Though he was cast into prison, we read of his singing, never of his groaning. I do not believe he ever wept on account of any sufferings or dangers to which he himself was exposed for Christ's sake. I call this an extraordinary sorrow, because the man who wept was no soft piece of sentiment, and seldom shed a tear even under grievous trials." (Spurgeon)

iii. "Professors of religion, who get into the church, and yet lead ungodly lives, are the worst enemies that the cross of Christ has. These are the sort of men who bring tears into the minister's eyes; these are they who break his heart; they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." (Spurgeon)

c. **Whose end is destruction:** The word translated **destruction** is the same word used for *perdition* in other places (such as Php 1:28). This can refer to either their ultimate damnation or to the present destruction of their lives. Probably their ultimate damnation is more in view.

d. **Whose god is their belly:** This describes the idolatry of these **enemies**. Not that they were necessarily focused on what they eat, but **belly** here has a broader reference to sensual indulgence in general. They live for the pleasures of the body, mind, and soul.

e. **Whose glory is in their shame:** This shows the misplaced priorities of these **enemies**. They gloried about things they should have been ashamed about.

f. **Who set their mind on earthly things:** This describes the focus of their life. It was not to please and worship God, but to get along in *this* world. Their attitude was the same as the rich fool in Luk 12:16-21.

3. (20) Our citizenship and our Lord.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

a. **For our citizenship is in heaven:** We need to appreciate all this would have meant to the Philippians, who greatly valued their Roman citizenship. Just as the Philippians could consider themselves citizens of Rome and were under Roman laws and customs (even though they were in fact far from Rome) so Christians should consider themselves citizens of heaven.

i. One paraphrase of **citizenship is in heaven** reads like this: "We have our home in heaven, and here on earth we are a colony of heaven's citizens." Paul is saying: "Just as the Roman colonists never forgot that they belong to Rome, you must never forget that you are citizens of heaven; and your conduct must match your citizenship." (Barclay)

ii. If we are citizens of heaven, it means that we are resident aliens on earth. Foreigners are distinct in whatever foreign land they go. Christians must be so marked by their heavenly citizenship that they are noticed as different.

- Aliens should seek to do good works in the land they sojourn in.
- Aliens should not seek to interfere in the affairs of the land they sojourn in.
- Aliens have privileges as well as duties; they are not under the same obligations as citizens of the land they sojourn in.
- Aliens are not eligible for the same rewards and recognitions as the citizens of the land that they sojourn in.

- Aliens should not focus on building riches in the land they sojourn in.

iii. We also have a certain character as citizens of heaven.

- As citizens we are under the government of heaven.
- As citizens we share in heaven's honors.
- As citizens we have property rights in heaven.
- As citizens we enjoy the pleasures of heaven.
- As citizens of heaven we love heaven and feel attached there.
- As citizens of heaven we keep in communication with our native home.

iv. "How heartily the Germans sing of the dear old fatherland; but they cannot, with all their Germanic patriotism, they cannot beat the genial glow of the Briton's heart, when he thinks of his fatherland too. The Scotchman, too, wherever he may be, remembers the land of 'brown heath and shaggy wood.' And the Irishman, too, let him be where he will, still thinks the 'Emerald Isle' the first gem of the sea. It is right that the patriot should love his country. Does not our love fervently flame towards heaven?" (Spurgeon)

v. There is a significant contrast between the citizens of earth as described in Php 3:18-19 and the citizens of heaven as described in Php 3:20-21.

b. From which we also eagerly wait for the Savior:

As Philippians would eagerly await a visit from the emperor in Rome, even more so should Christians eagerly await the coming of their King – Jesus Christ.

i. **Savior** was a title given to the Caesars. In 48 B.C. Julius Caesar was declared to be "the universal savior of mankind." It then became a common title for the ruling Caesar. Paul means something when he applies the title to Jesus in the context of **citizenship**.

c. **The Lord Jesus Christ**: The title **Lord** was also applied to the Roman Caesar. It wasn't long after the time of Paul that Christians were martyred for refusing to call Caesar **Lord**, claiming that Jesus was the only **Lord**.

4. (21) *The future work of our Savior: transforming our bodies.*

Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

a. **Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body**: Our *Savior* can do and will do something that no Caesar can. When we are resurrected, we will have the same type of body that Jesus Himself had when he was resurrected.

i. Jesus was not merely resuscitated from the dead in the same body. He was resurrected in a new body, patterned after the old yet equipped and fitted for heaven.

b. **According to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself**: This is possible only because the God we serve is omnipotent. **He is able even to subdue all things to Himself** and accomplish something as amazing as the resurrection of our bodies after the pattern of Jesus' resurrection.

i. Jesus really can **subdue all things**. "There may be sins within your heart that have long resisted control.

Do with them as you will, they still defy you... But if you will hand over the conflict to Jesus, He will subdue them; He will bring them under his strong, subjecting hand. Be of good cheer. What you cannot do, He can." (Meyer)

Php 4:1 So as, my brothers, ones loved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, beloved ones.

Exhortation, Encouragement, and Prayer

Php 4:2 I entreat Euodias, and I entreat Syntyche, to mind the same thing in the Lord.

Php 4:3 And I also ask you, true yoke-fellow, help those who struggled along with me and with Clement in the gospel, and the rest, fellow-workers with me, whose names are in the Scroll of Life.

Php 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, Rejoice!

Php 4:5 Let your reasonableness be known to all men. The Lord is near.

Php 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and by petition with thanksgivings, let your requests be made known to God;

Php 4:7 and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Php 4:8 For the rest, brothers, whatever is true, whatever honorable, whatever is right, whatever pure, whatever lovely, whatever of good report, if of any virtue, and if of any praise, think on these things.

Php 4:9 And what things you learned and received and heard and saw in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

God's Provision

Php 4:10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last you revived your thinking of me (although you indeed did

think, but lacked opportunity).

Php 4:11 Not that I speak as to need, for I have learned to be content in whatever state I am.

Php 4:12 But I know to be humbled, and I know to abound; in everything, and in all things, I am taught both to be filled and to hunger, both to abound, and to lack.

Php 4:13 I can do all things through Christ, the One giving me power.

Php 4:14 Yet you did well in sharing my troubles.

Php 4:15 And you know, too, Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I went out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only.

Php 4:16 Because truly in Thessalonica you sent to my need, both once and twice.

Php 4:17 Not that I seek a gift, but I seek the fruit multiplying to your account.

Php 4:18 But I have all things and more than enough; I have been filled, receiving from Epaphroditus the things from you , an odor of sweet smell, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Php 4:19 And my God will fill your every need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Php 4:20 Now may glory be to our God and Father forever and ever. Amen.

Final Greetings

Php 4:21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers with me greet you.

Php 4:22 All the saints greet you, most of all those of Caesar's house.

Php 4:23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you. Amen.

Philippians 4:1-23

Philippians 4 - Peace and Joy in All Circumstances

A. Instructions to specific saints.

1. (1) *A general exhortation: in light of your destiny in Christ, stand fast.*

Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

a. **Therefore:** This links together what Paul wrote here with what he wrote before. Because of the promise of resurrection (Php 3:21), the Philippians had all the more reason to **stand fast in the Lord**.

b. **My joy and crown:** Paul used the ancient Greek word for **crown** that described the crown given to an athlete who had won the race. It was a crown of achievement (a *stephanos*); not the crown that was given to a king (a *diadema*). The Philippians, as they **stand fast in the Lord**, were Paul's trophy.

c. **So stand fast in the Lord, beloved:** We can only **stand fast** when we are **in the Lord**; any other place is not a secure place to stand.

2. (2) *Instructions to Euodia and Syntyche.*

I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

a. **Euodia and... Syntyche:** Apparently these two women were the source of some sort of quarrel in the church. Instead of taking sides or trying to solve their problem, Paul simply told them to **be of the same mind in the Lord**.

b. **To be of the same mind in the Lord:** Whatever the dispute was about, **Euodia** and **Syntyche** had forgotten that they have a greater common ground in Jesus Christ.

They forgot that everything else was less important than that common ground.

3. (3) *Instructions to the **true companion**.*

And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

a. **I urge you also, true companion:** Whoever this was, Paul instructed them to **help these women who labored with me in the gospel**. The **true companion** was supposed to **help** these women to reconcile and come to one mind in the Lord.

i. **These women who labored with me in the gospel** is a telling phrase. These two women, Euodia and Syntyche, were faithful workers with Paul in the work of the gospel. Yet, they had a falling out with each other. Paul knew that this unfortunate dispute needed to be cleared up.

b. **With Clement also:** There was a notable **Clement** in the early church who was the leader of the church in Rome and wrote two preserved letters to the church in Corinth. Yet we don't know if this is the same Clement. It was a common name in the Roman world.

i. We can contrast the brief mention of Euodia and Syntyche with the brief mention of Clement. If you had to have your whole life summed up in one sentence, would you like it to be summed up like Clement or like Euodia and Syntyche?

c. **And the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life:** There were others in Philippi who also helped Paul. They had the greatest honor in the world: to have their names in **the Book of Life** (Rev 20:15).

B. More instruction on walking the walk.

1. (4) Paul repeats a major theme of the letter.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

a. **Rejoice:** Despite the circumstance from which it was written, *joy* is all over the letter to the Philippians. Examples of this are in Php 1:4; Php 1:18; Php 1:25; Php 2:2; Php 2:16-18; Php 2:28; Php 3:1; Php 3:3; Php 4:1.

i. "I am glad that we do not know what the quarrel was about; I am usually thankful for ignorance on such subjects; - but as a cure for disagreements, the apostle says, 'Rejoice in the Lord always.' People who are very happy, especially those who are very happy in the Lord, are not apt either to give offense or to take offense. Their minds are so sweetly occupied with higher things, that they are not easily distracted by the little troubles which naturally arise among such imperfect creatures as we are. Joy in the Lord is the cure for all discord." (Spurgeon)

b. **Rejoice in the Lord always:** Again, Paul's joy wasn't based in a sunny optimism or positive mental attitude as much as it was the confidence that God was in control. It really was a joy **in the Lord**.

i. "What a gracious God we serve, who makes delight to be a duty, and who commands us to rejoice! Should we not at once be obedient to such a command as this? It is intended that we should be happy." (Spurgeon)

2. (5) Show a gentle disposition to all men.

Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.

a. **Let your gentleness be known:** Paul used an interesting ancient Greek word (*epieikeia*) that is translated **gentleness** here. Other translations of the Bible translate *epieikeia* as patience, softness, the patient mind, modesty, forbearance, the forbearing spirit, or magnanimity.

i. "The word *epieikes* is of very extensive signification; it means the same as *epieikeia*, mildness, patience, yieldingness, gentleness, clemency, *moderation*, unwillingness to litigate or contend; but *moderation* is expressive enough as a general term." (Clarke)

ii. A good example of this quality is when Jesus showed **gentleness** with the woman who was taken in adultery in a set-up and brought to Jesus. He knew how to show a holy **gentleness** to her.

iii. This word describes the heart of a person who will let the Lord fight his battles. He knows that *vengeance is Mine, says the Lord* (Rom 12:19). It describes a person who is really free to let go of His anxieties and all the things that cause him stress, because he knows that the Lord will take up his cause.

b. **Be known to all men:** The sphere is broad. We show this gentleness to **all men**, not just to whom we please.

c. **The Lord is at hand:** When we live with the awareness of Jesus' soon return, it makes it all the more easy to *rejoice in the Lord* and to show **gentleness** to all men. We know that Jesus will settle every wrong at His return, and we can trust Him to make things right in our falling-apart world.

3. (6) *A living prayer life.*

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests

be made known to God;

a. **Be anxious for nothing:** This is a command, not an option. Undue care is an intrusion into an arena that belongs to God alone. It makes us the father of the household instead of being a child.

b. **But in everything by prayer and supplication:** Paul wrote that **everything** is the proper subject of prayer. There are not some areas of our lives that are of no concern to God.

c. **Prayer and supplication:** These two aspects of prayer are similar, but distinct. **Prayer** is a broader word that can mean all of our communication with God, but **supplication** directly asks God to do something.

i. Many of our prayers go unanswered because we do not *ask* God for anything. Here God invites us simply to **let your requests be made known**. He wants to know.

d. **Be made known:** God already knows our requests before we pray them; yet He will often *wait* for our participation through prayer before granting that which we request.

e. **With thanksgiving:** This guards against a whining, complaining spirit before God when we let our requests be made known. We really can be anxious for nothing, pray about everything, and be thankful for anything.

4. (7) The promise of peace.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

a. **And the peace of God:** The Bible describes three great aspects of **peace** that relate to God.

- *Peace from God*: Paul continually used this as an introduction to his letters; it reminds us that our peace comes to us as a gift from God.

- *Peace with God*: This describes a relationship that we enter into with God through the finished work of Jesus Christ.

- **The peace of God**: This is the peace spoken of in Php 4:7. It is beyond "all mind"; that is, beyond our power of thinking.

- i. "What is God's peace? The unruffled serenity of the infinitely-happy God, the eternal composure of the absolutely well-contented God." (Spurgeon)

- b. **Which surpasses all understanding**: It isn't that it is senseless and therefore impossible to understand, but that it is beyond our ability to understand and to explain - therefore it must be *experienced*.

- i. This peace doesn't just surpass the understanding of the worldly man; it surpasses **all understanding**. Even the godly man can not comprehend this peace.

- c. **Guard your hearts and minds**: The word **guard** speaks of a military action. This is something that the peace of God does for us; it is a peace that is on **guard** over our heart and mind.

- i. "Shall keep them as in a strong place or a castle." (Clarke)

- ii. When people seem to "lose" their heart or mind, it often is connected to an absence of the peace of God in their life. The peace of God then does not act as a **guard** for their **hearts and minds**.

5. (8) *The right place to put our minds.*

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever

things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

a. **Whatever things are true:** Paul's list of things on which we should meditate translates well from the Greek to the English; there is no great need for elaboration upon each item.

b. **Noble... just... pure... lovely... good report... virtue... praiseworthy:** These, Paul would say, are the fruit and the food of the mind that is guarded by the peace of God. When we put these good things into our mind, they *stay* in our mind and then come forth from us.

c. **Meditate on these things:** Much of the Christian life comes down to the *mind*. Rom 12:2 speaks of the essential place of being *transformed by the renewing of your mind* and 2Co 10:5 speaks of the importance of *casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*. What we choose to **meditate on** matters.

i. What Paul describes here is a practical way to bring *every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*.

6. (9) *A return to the idea of following Paul's example.*

The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

a. **The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do:** Paul had the integrity to present himself as an example of all these things to

the Philippians. He really could say, "Follow me as I follow Jesus."

b. **And the God of peace will be with you:** If the Philippians did as Paul had instructed, not only would they have had the peace of God, but the **God of peace** would have also been with them.

C. Paul comments on the giving of the Philippians.

1. (10-14) *Paul's perspective on the gift from the Philippians.*

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress.

a. **Your care for me has flourished again:** This refers to the financial support brought by Epaphroditus (Php 2:25). Paul didn't want to imply that the Philippians didn't care before, only that before they **lacked opportunity**. When they had the opportunity, then their **care** for Paul **flourished again**.

b. **Not that I speak in regard to need:** Paul reminded the Philippians that his thankfulness for the Philippians' giving wasn't *because* he was needy (though he was in fact in need), but because it was good for *them* to be givers.

c. **I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:** This was *how* Paul could say that his

thankfulness was not based upon his own need. Even though Paul was in need, he was content where he was at – even in his Roman imprisonment.

i. **I have learned:** Paul had to *learn* contentment; it isn't natural to mankind.

ii. **I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound:** Paul reminds us that his contentment was not only theoretical. He actually *lived* this. Paul *had* been financially well-off; he *had* been financially in need.

iii. Paul knew **how to be abased**. "See here the state to which God permitted his chief apostle to be reduced! And see how powerfully the grace of Christ supported him under the whole! How few of those who are called Christian ministers or Christian men have learned this important lesson! When want or affliction comes, their complaints are loud and frequent; and they are soon at the end of their patience." (Clarke)

iv. Paul also knew **how to abound**. "There are a great many men that know a little how to be abased, that do not know at all how to abound. When they are put down into the pit with Joseph, they look up and see the starry promise, and they hope for an escape. But when they are put on the top of a pinnacle, their heads grow dizzy, and they are ready to fall." (Spurgeon)

d. **I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me:** This refers to Paul's ability to be content in all things. To achieve this contentment, he needed the strength of Jesus Christ.

i. Unfortunately, many people take this verse out of context and use it to reinforce a "triumphalist" or

“super-Christian” mentality, instead of seeing that the strength of Jesus in Paul’s life was evident in his ability **to be content** when he did **suffer need**.

ii. We must always also put this precious statement of faith in connection with Joh 15:5 : *for without Me you can do nothing*. With Jesus we can do all things, without Him we can’t do anything.

e. **Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress**: In speaking about his ability to be content, Paul did not want to give the impression that the Philippians had somehow done something wrong in supporting Paul. But there was a real sense in which the giving of the Philippians was better *for them* than it was for Paul (**you have done well**). Godly giving actually does more good for the giver than for the one who receives.

2. (15-18) *Thanks for the past and present giving of the Philippians.*

Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent *aid* once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things *sent* from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

a. **The beginning of the gospel**: This refers to Paul’s pioneering missionary efforts in Europe, recorded in Acts 16 and following.

b. **No church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only**: The Philippians were the only

ones to support Paul during this particular period. Paul especially remembered how they supported him when he was in Thessalonica.

i. "Probably the gift does not come to very much, if estimated in Roman coin; but he makes a great deal of it, and sits down to write a letter of thanks abounding in rich expressions like these." (Spurgeon)

ii. "While labouring to plant the church there, he was supported partly by working with his hands, 1Th 2:9; 2Th 3:7-9; and partly by the contributions sent him from Philippi. Even the Thessalonians had contributed little to his maintenance: this is not spoken to their credit." (Clarke)

c. **Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account:** Paul wasn't so much interested in the **gift** on his own behalf, but in the **fruit that abounds to your account**. Their giving increased the fruit in their **account** before God.

i. "It is not the actual gift put into Paul's hands which has brought him joy, but the giving and the meaning of that giving. It is the truest index to the abiding reality of his work." (Kennedy)

ii. This reflects one of the most important principles regarding giving in the Scriptures: that we are never the poorer for having given. God will never be our debtor, and we can never out-give God.

d. **A sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God:** Paul described the gift of the Philippians in terms that remind us of sacrifices in the Old Testament (Gen 8:21, Exo 29:18; Exo 29:25; Exo 29:41). Our giving to God's work is similar to Old Testament sacrifices, which also cost the person bringing

the sacrifice a lot. Bulls and rams did not come cheaply in that day.

i. Eph 5:2 uses the same terminology in reference to Jesus' sacrifice for us; our sacrifices are likewise pleasing to God as **a sweet-smelling aroma**.

ii. In 2Co 8:1-5, Paul boasted about the Philippians as an example of the right kind of giving. He describes how they gave *willingly*, out of their own *need*, and they gave after *first having given themselves* to the Lord.

3. (19) *Paul declares a promise to the Philippians regarding their own financial needs.*

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

a. **My God shall supply all your need:** We shouldn't think that the Philippians were wealthy benefactors of Paul who could easily spare the money. As Paul described them in 2 Corinthians 8, it is plain that their giving was sacrificial. This promise *meant* something to them!

i. "He says to them, 'You have helped me; but my God shall supply you. You have helped me in one of my needs-my need of clothing and of food: I have other needs in which you could not help me; but my God shall supply all your need. You have helped me, some of you, out of your deep poverty, taking from your scanty store; but my God shall supply all your need out of his riches in glory.'" (Spurgeon)

b. **Shall supply all your need:** The promise is to supply ***all your need***; but it is ***all your need*** (not a promise to go beyond needs) In this, the promise is both broad and yet restricted.

c. **According to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus:** This is a staggering *measure* of giving. Since there is no

lack in God's **riches in glory**, we should anticipate that there would be no lack in God's supply.

i. "The rewarding will not be merely from His wealth, but also in a manner that befits His wealth - on a scale worthy of His wealth." (Martin)

ii. Spurgeon thought that this verse was a great illustration of that wonderful miracle in 2Ki 4:1-7, where Elisha told the widow to gather empty vessels, set them out, and pour forth the oil from the one small vessel of oil she had into the empty vessels. She filled and filled and miraculously filled until every empty vessel was full.

- *All our need* is like the empty vessels.
- *God* is the one who fills the empty vessels.
- *According to His riches in glory* describes the style in which God fills the empty vessels – the oil keeps flowing until every available vessel is filled.
- *By Christ Jesus* describes the how God meets our needs – our empty vessels are filled by Jesus in all His glory.

d. **All your need**: We also notice that this promise was made to the Philippians – those who had surrendered their finances and material possessions to God's service, and who knew how to give with the right kind of heart.

i. This promise simply expresses what Jesus said in Luk 6:38 : *Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.*

D. Conclusion to the letter.

1. (20) *A brief doxology.*

Now to our God and Father *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

a. **Be glory forever and ever:** It is wrong to think of this as an unthinking comment made by Paul in the way that we throw off comments like “glory to God” or “praise the Lord” in our Christian culture. Paul genuinely wanted God to be glorified and was willing to be used in whatever way God saw fit to glorify Himself (Php 1:20).

b. **Amen:** This was a word borrowed from Hebrew meaning, “So be it.” It is an expression of confident and joyful affirmation.

2. (21-22) *Mutual greetings expressed.*

Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar’s household.

a. **Greet every saint:** Paul did not here give specific greetings to individuals as he did in other letters. Rather, he greeted **every saint** in Christ Jesus. This also is another example of the fact that the title **saint** applies to all Christians, not just to an elite few.

b. **All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar’s household:** This special greeting is evidence that Paul was still used by God during his Roman imprisonment, when the gospel extended even into the household of Caesar.

i. **Those who are of Caesar’s household:** “By this he designates the functionaries and servants and slaves of the Emperor’s household, with whom Paul, as a prisoner for several years, undoubtedly came in contact on several occasions.” (Muller)

ii. “Nero was at this time emperor of Rome: a more worthless, cruel, and diabolic wretch never disgraced the name or form of man; yet in *his family* there

were Christians: but whether this relates to the members of the *imperial family*, or to *guards*, or *courtiers*, or to *servants*, we cannot tell." (Clarke)

3. (23) *Final words.*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

a. **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all:** Paul did not say this to simply fill up space at the end of his letter. To him, the Christian life begins and ends with the **grace of our Lord Jesus Christ**, so it was appropriate that his letters began and ended with **grace** also.

b. **Amen:** This was a fitting word of affirmation. Paul knew that what he wrote to the Philippians was worthy to be agreed with, so he added the final word of agreement - **Amen**.